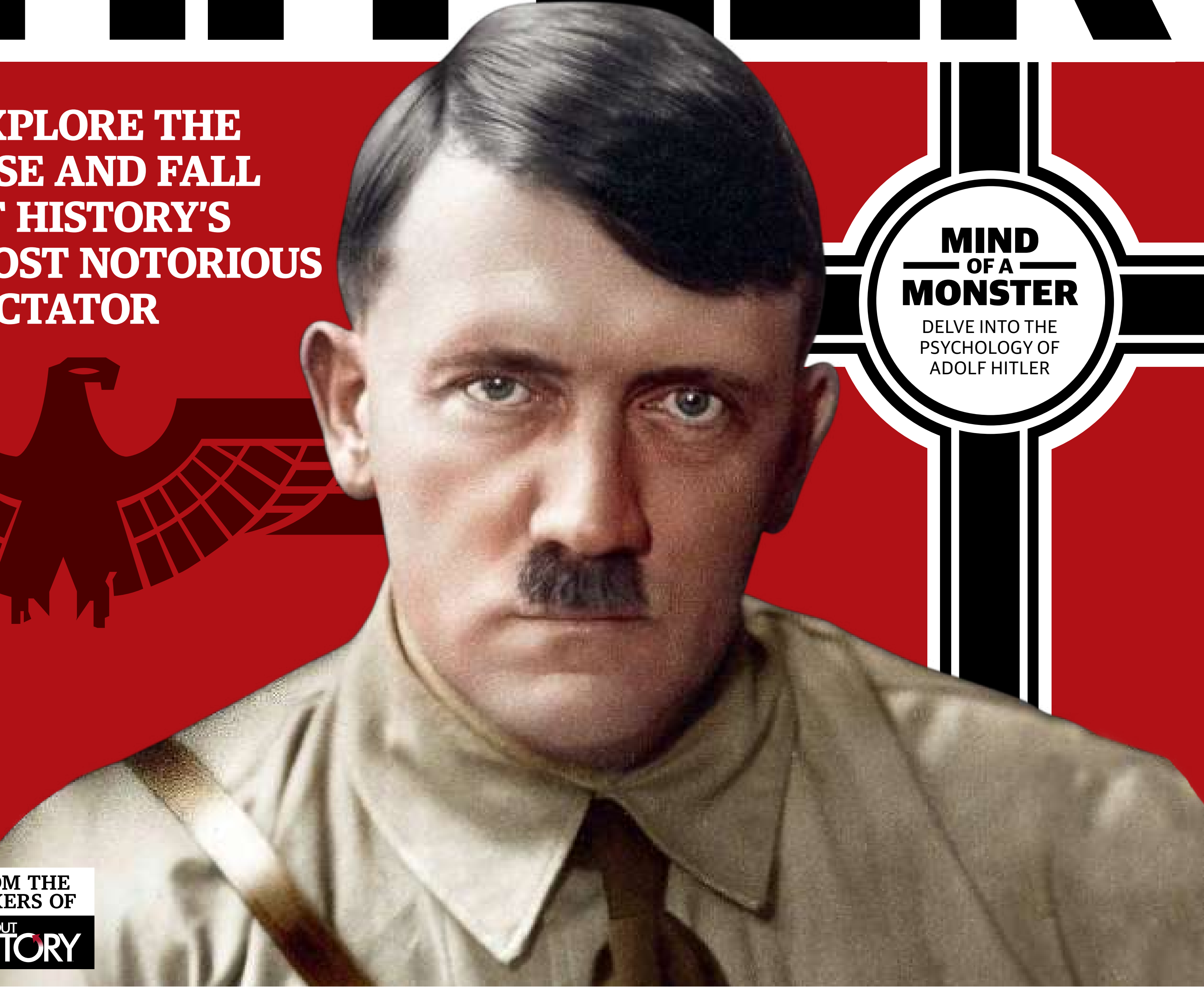
NEW

HITLER

EXPLORE THE RISE AND FALL OF HISTORY'S MOST NOTORIOUS DICTATOR



MIND OF A MONSTER

DELVE INTO THE PSYCHOLOGY OF ADOLF HITLER

FROM THE MAKERS OF
ALL ABOUT HISTORY

Digital Edition

FUTURE

THIRD EDITION

YOUNG HITLER • HITLER IN LOVE • THE DEATH CAMPS • HIS FINAL HOURS

WELCOME TO THE *Book of* HITLER

On 30 April 1945, with Berlin surrounded and Nazi Germany all but defeated, Adolf Hitler put his Walther PPK pistol to his head, took a deep breath, and pulled the trigger. The Führer was dead, his bloody reign of terror finally at an end.

In the Book of Hitler, we look back at the brutal rise and dramatic fall of history's most hated man, from his troubled early years and experiences during World War I to his use of repression, racism and riots to take control and maintain power in Germany. Hitler's military leadership style and how it affected the outcome of World War II is explored in detail alongside fascinating features on key moments from the conflict, such as his clash with Soviet giant Josef Stalin and Nazi Germany's last stand in Berlin, while we also look at Hitler's plans for global domination and the lasting impact his brief reign continues to have on the world.

FUTURE

HITLER

Future PLC Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA

Bookazine Editorial
Editor **Dan Peel**
Compiled by **Sarah Bankes & Newton Ribeiro**
Senior Art Editor **Andy Downes**
Head of Art & Design **Greg Whitaker**
Editorial Director **Jon White**

All About History Editorial
Editor **Jonathan Gordon**
Art Editor **Kym Winters**
Editor in Chief **Tim Williamson**
Senior Art Editor **Duncan Crook**

Contributors
David Foley, Katharine Marsh, Michael Haskew,
Philippa Grafton, Will Lawrence

Cover images
Mary Evans, Alamy, Getty Images

Photography
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Commercial Director **Clare Dove**

International
Head of Print Licensing **Rachel Shaw**
licensing@futurenet.com
www.futurecontenthub.com

Circulation
Head of Newstrade **Tim Mathers**

Production
Head of Production **Mark Constance**
Production Project Manager **Matthew Eglinton**
Advertising Production Manager **Joanne Crosby**
Digital Editions Controller **Jason Hudson**
Production Managers **Keely Miller, Nola Cokely,**
Vivienne Calvert, Fran Twentyman

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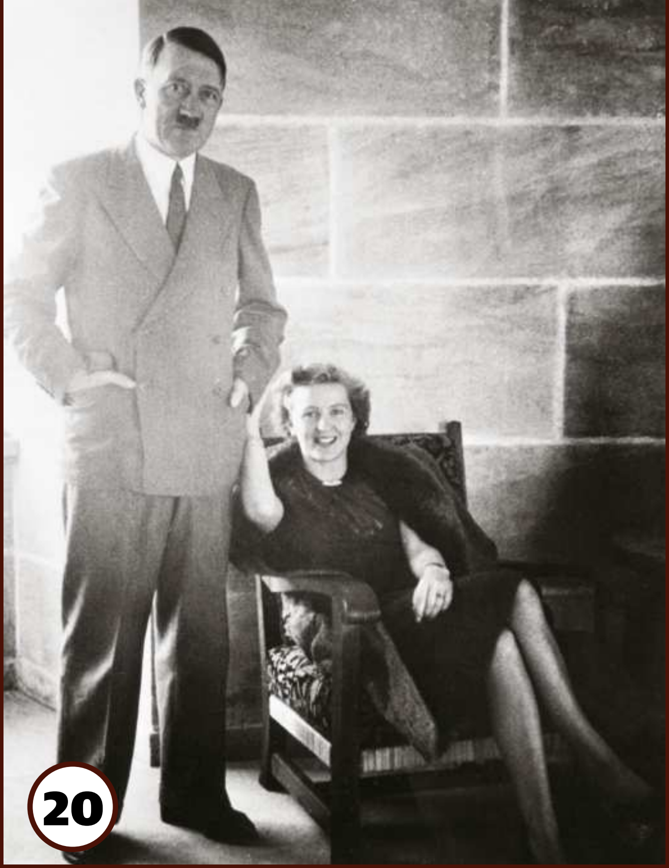
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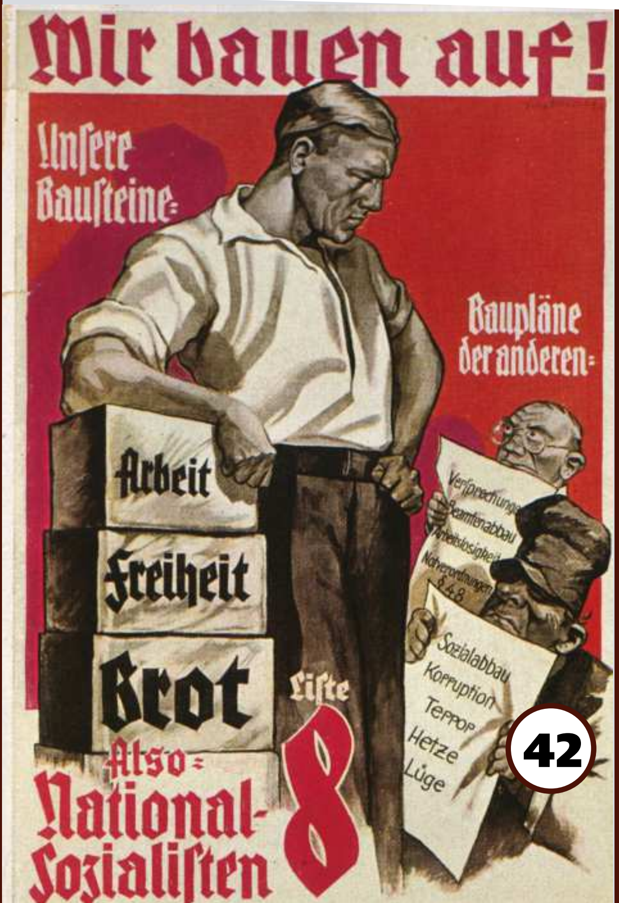
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An infant Adolf Hitler, photographed around 1890

© Photo by ullstein bild via Getty Images

THE YOUNG HITLER

With a troubled upbringing, he displayed none of the conviction that would mark his later years

Written by David Foley

The man who would grow up to be one of the most despised figures of the 20th century was born in Braunau am Inn, Austria. More than 1,000 biographies of Adolf Hitler have been written, but all struggle to tell the story of his early years due to a crippling lack of documentary sources to draw upon. But this has not stopped historians from joining the dots and filling in the blanks, producing theories and guesses about how the young Hitler grew up.

The temptation is understandable – surely there must be clues in that childhood to explain how a seemingly ordinary boy turned into a genocidal monster? Was there a turning point, an event so awful that it nudged the young Adolf onto a new path, one that ultimately led to the deaths of millions of people in the most destructive war the world has ever seen? Or was there a slow accumulation of influences that gradually warped him into the familiar despot?

Unfortunately, the truth is that there are no easy answers. Hitler appears to have been an utterly unremarkable child and to have lived an uneventful, somewhat lazy life until the experience of World War I transformed him, or at least began the change. The story is blurred by Hitler's own rewriting of his personal history in the pages of *Mein Kampf*. There, he claimed beliefs and convictions that he simply did not hold as a young man, and the propaganda machine of the Nazi Party also sought to write a new version of the Führer's early years. The one they concocted was of a man with deeply held beliefs and opinions, who was fired, from a very early age, by a determination to rebuild the German nation and save it from the Jewish and Bolshevik menace. In reality, the young Hitler does not appear to have cared much about anything at all – except for, perhaps, the opera.

An unexceptional child

One of six children born into a middle-class family, Hitler's childhood was not particularly happy, but nor was it unusually harsh for the time. His father, Alois, was a violent man who beat the young Adolf regularly, but this was considered more or less normal at the end of the 19th century. Alois had married for a third time, to the much younger Klara Pölzl, and Hitler was very fond of his mother, which gave him a refuge from the coldness of his father. Hitler was also close to his younger sister, Paula, and they were the only two out of the six Hitler children to survive childhood.

Three younger siblings - Gustav, Ida and Otto - had died before Hitler arrived on 20 April 1889, while another brother, Edmund, died at the age of five. Paula was the last of the children to make an appearance, in 1896.

Hitler would later see his birthplace as deeply symbolic, being near the border of Germany and Austria. In *Mein Kampf* he wrote: "This little frontier town appeared to me as the symbol of a great task." The great task he referred to was the unification of Austria and Germany into "the great German motherland". It is highly unlikely he harboured such grandiose ambitions as a child.

Alois decided that his son was better suited to a Realschule, which offered vocational education, rather than a more academic institution. Whether or not Hitler would have done better at an academic school is impossible to know, but it seems unlikely as he was generally a listless and unimpressive student. He did enjoy history, but otherwise he showed no aptitude or inclination in any of his classes.

Hitler would later tell a couple of stories, which seem a little too convenient to be totally believable, explaining his aversion to smoking and drinking. Apparently, the young Adolf had once tried a cigarette and had made himself sick, while a drunken episode had led to him falling into a dung heap. Whether or not these tales are true, they are among the only episodes of his youth that we have any details about.

Hitler painted a rather rosy picture of himself at this stage of his life. "I spent a good deal of time scampering about in the open, on the long road from school," he recalled, "and mixing up

Hitler (centre back) at school in Lambach, Austria, in 1899

> "He continued to paint on a small scale, but enjoyed at least some success, producing as many as 3,000 works during his career"

One of the Hitler homes, in Leonding, Austria

Hitler's birthplace, Braunau am Inn

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HITLER AND WAGNER

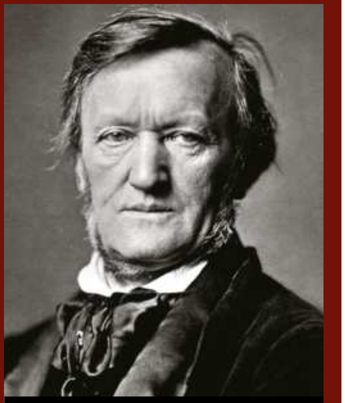
Opera was Hitler's greatest passion, and one composer stood above all others in his estimation

The extent of the influence of Richard Wagner on Hitler has been debated for decades. There were anti-Semitic elements in Wagner's work, and some historians have claimed this may have had an affect on Hitler's development, but this remains uncertain.

The novelist Thomas Mann once wrote that "there is a good deal of Hitler in Wagner", and the composer has been accused of being an early form of Nazi. At the same time, historians have put forward the idea that Wagner became an absolute authority figure for Hitler. "I recognise in Wagner my only predecessor," he was once quoted as saying. "I regard him as a supreme prophetic figure."

In the pages of *Mein Kampf*, Hitler often employed Wagnerian metaphors, at one point talking about restoring freedom to "the German Siegfried" and at another labelling the alliance with the Austro-Hungarian Empire in World War I as a "Nibelungen alliance", referring to Wagner's *Ring Cycle*.

The extent of Wagner's influence on Hitler would be hinted at in a comment he made about a viewing of *Rienzi*, an early Wagner opera, when he was just 15. The character of Rienzi was the last tribune of Medieval Rome, and had attempted to bring Rome back to its glory days. Hitler later admitted to wanting to be "a people's tribune", and his words on recollecting that first viewing of *Rienzi* carry a chilling weight. Describing the experience as hugely influential in his development, he added, "In that hour, it all began."



The possible influence of Wagner on Hitler has tantalised biographers and historians alike

with some of the roughest of the boys." A lively roughneck was a good image to sell as a politician, and Hitler was almost certainly rewriting the past when he claimed to have started to develop a flair for oratory during long arguments with his friends. Paula did, however, remember that he was a bossy child and liked to get his own way, so there may be some truth in the recollection.

Hitler also claimed that his discovery of a two-volume history of the Franco-German War of 1870 was as a seminal moment in his life. "From that time onwards," he remembered, "I became more and more enthusiastic about everything that was in any way connected with war or military affairs." The book is also cited as planting the seed for one of Hitler's most entrenched beliefs - that the German people were defined by more than just the borders of the nation. He asked himself why other Germanic people, like the Austrians, had not fought in the war with the French. "Why did not my father and all the others fight in that struggle?" he asked in *Mein Kampf.* "Are we not the same as the other Germans? Do we not all belong together?"

A restless home life - Alois' job as a customs official meant he had to move frequently - was made more tense when Hitler announced he wanted to be an artist. Alois strongly disapproved, wanting him to enter the civil service, and the power struggle between the two escalated, with Hitler seemingly almost taunting his father with his decision. How the struggle might have ended is unknown, because Alois died in 1903.

Hitler would later rationalise his relationship with Alois and claim it had a positive influence on him, teaching him toughness. "My father often dealt me hard blows," he wrote. "Moreover, I think that was necessary and helped me." Alois was referred to as "the old gentleman", but his mother was discussed in warmer terms, like how she "lovingly devoted herself to the care of her children".

Whether or not Hitler had appreciated his father's brand of tough love, he was now free of his influence. Two years after Alois' death, Hiter left school with no decent qualifications, despite later claiming that he had "learned well and easily". His mother had apparently wished him to enter the civil service and there is some evidence that Hitler feigned illness to finally get out of going to school. Along with his mother and sister he went to live in Linz, near his birthplace. Life appears to have been uneventful but fairly happy for the young man - he was content to be supported by his family and showed no inclination to find work himself. His only ambitions, such as they were, were for his art.

The Vienna years

In 1907, when he turned 18, Hitler received a small inheritance. It was just about enough to live on for a year and he took the opportunity to travel to Vienna with hopes of being accepted into the Academy of Fine Arts. In this, Hitler was in some way following in his father's footsteps. Half a century earlier, Alois had travelled to Vienna as a 13-year-old, entering the civil service ten years later.

Hitler's dream was quickly cut short when he was rejected by the academy, with the comment "sample drawing unsatisfactory" on his notes. It was a disappointing result, but his commitment to art had never seemed whole-hearted.

After a second application to the academy was turned down, Hitler was given a little advice by the admissions board, who suggested that he seemed better suited to a career as an architect. Unable to enrol on a recognised architecture course because of his poor performance at school, Hitler nonetheless attempted to teach himself the principles of the discipline, but apparently got nowhere. He continued to paint on a small scale, but enjoyed at least some success, producing as many as 3,000 works during his career. Sales,

A LOVING MOTHER

Klara appears to be the only person Hitler formed a truly close bond with

Hitler's relationship with his mother has offered fertile ground for psychologists to explore. Klara Pölzl had first worked for Alois Hitler as a housemaid, and the two had married in January 1885. As well as her own two surviving children, Klara was stepmother to Alois Jr and Angela, children from Alois' second marriage.

Apparently a gentle and loving mother, Klara offered Hitler a refuge from the harsh presence of his father, and allegations that he developed an Oedipus complex have been a common feature of biographies and studies of the dictator.

Klara's death from breast cancer was a distressing experience even by the standards of the day. A mastectomy having failed to cure her, she was given experimental treatment by the family doctor, Eduard Bloch, which was both ineffective and extremely painful. She died in 1907.

Hitler struggled to form close relationships throughout his life, and some have claimed that his mother was the only person he truly loved. Bloch noted their strong bond while treating Klara, commenting: "Outwardly, his love for his mother was his most striking feature. I have never witnessed a closer attachment."

Intrigue is added by the fact that Bloch was Jewish, but although his treatment had been excruciating for Klara, Hitler showed no signs of anger and even kept in touch with the doctor for a long while afterwards. The theory that this episode had in some way influenced Hitler's hatred for the Jews does not appear to carry any weight.

Klara Pölzl was possibly a first cousin, once removed to Alois Hitler, but their exact relationship is unclear

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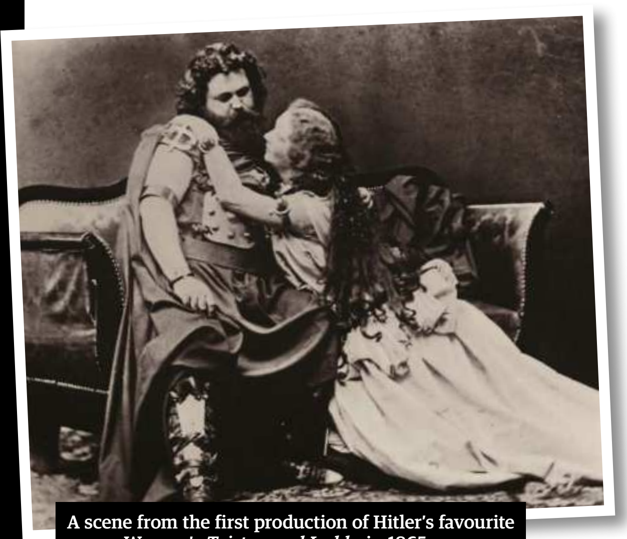


A scene from the first production of Hitler's favourite opera, Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, in 1865

although they did not bring in much money, supplemented his small income. Hitler was always ambivalent about what his 'career' actually was – forms filled in during this period variously listed his profession as 'artist', 'writer' and 'architecture painter', among others. During his seven-year stay in Vienna, he exhibited his work on the streets and made small sales as and when the opportunity arose. He also worked with a dealer who would sell framed works, opening up a wider market.

Art, however, always seemed more like a way of making a living rather than a real love for Hitler, and his work seems devoid of any inspiration. Just about the only thing he showed genuine passion for was the opera. He was a huge opera buff, queuing for hours to see his favourite shows over and over. Paula would later claim he had seen *Götterdämmerung* 13 times while in Linz, and Hitler himself claimed to have seen *Tristan und Isolde* – by his favourite composer, Wagner – over 40 times while in Vienna.

Hitler would later state that the beauty of music had convinced him to avoid a life of banality, and was at the heart of his decision to avoid a career in the civil service. It seems obvious that a dislike of work was at least equally responsible for his decision.

One of the most curious elements of Hitler's youth is that he does not appear to have had any animosity towards Jewish people. He often lived in hostels run by Jews, he was happy to borrow money from Jewish acquaintances and he joined none of the anti-Semitic groups in Vienna at the time – and there were plenty to choose from.

A friend, Reinhold Hanisch, commented that Hitler was on good terms with the Jews he came into contact with and only later adopted an anti-Semitic stance, more as a political tool than out of any real conviction. However, Hanisch's version of events (which was suppressed by the Nazis) is questionable because of his relationship with Hitler. The two had half-heartedly set up an art business together, but it had not gone well,

6445. P. Z. - WIEN. BURGTHEATER.

The Burgtheater in Vienna, as it appeared around 1900. It was badly damaged during a bombing raid in 1945

> "He exhibited his work on the streets and made small sales as and when the opportunity arose"

in Hanisch's mind because Hitler had not put in sufficient effort.

Even more unreliable, for different reasons, is the account of August Kubizek, another of Hitler's acquaintances. Kubizek told an entirely different story, insisting that Hitler had been a confirmed anti-Semite in Linz, even before he reached Vienna. This version of history, however, had been commissioned by the Nazi Party, making it almost certainly a fabrication. If so, it was a fabrication Hitler himself went along with.

An admittance of tolerating and even coexisting happily with Jews in his youth would have been damaging to his political image, and in *Mein Kampf* he made sure to paint a very different picture. He described how, as a youth, he had met a group of Jews: "The revolting feature was that beneath their unclean exterior one suddenly perceived the moral mildew of the chosen race… Here was a pestilence, a moral pestilence, with which the public was being infected." Offensive and ominous as these words may be, there is no evidence that Hitler had held views as extreme as this at such a young age. His hatred of the Jewish people appears to have developed later.

The Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, which twice turned down Hitler's application to attend

©Photo by Peter Haa

An aimless path

Money was tight in Vienna, but that owed much to the fact that Hitler was unwilling to find steady work. Manual labour in particular seemed to repel him, but he was once more bailed out by his family. After 1909 he began to get regular money from Paula, from their dead mother's estate. It was by no means a fortune, but the 80-100 Kronen per month was the equivalent to a modest salary in the civil service and Hitler no longer had to work at all.

In 1913 he moved to Munich. He would later refer to Vienna as "the Babylon of races", and claim that he was keen to escape its influences and live in Germany. If that had truly been the case, however, it seems unlikely he would have stayed there for as long as seven years.

His move may also have been intended to escape the draft in Austria, but he was soon forced to return to Vienna by German police. (There is a rumour that he even lived in Liverpool for a short period around this time.) Having apologised for leaving the country, and having taken a medical, he was declared unfit to serve in the army and was allowed to return to Munich.

Here, his art career took something of an upturn and he started to get commissions, including one from a judge and another from a pharmacist. Clearly his work was acceptable, but he seems to have had no high artistic goals. "I paint that which the people want to buy," he once confided. The advice from the Academy of Fine Arts, that he might be more cut out for a career as an architect, bears this out. There was little flair in his work and the more prosaic drawings of an architect may well have suited him better.

In all, Hitler's early life had been mostly uneventful and marked by a lack of driving purpose. Such purpose would only come after his experiences in the war, but Hitler was unwilling to accept this version of his life story, and crafted another. In this rendition, the experiences in the "Babylon of Vienna" had been instrumental in forming his weltanschauung, or world view. "During those years," he wrote in *Mein Kampf*, "a view of life and a definite outlook on the world took shape in my mind. These became the granite basis of my conduct at that time. Since then I have extended that foundation only very little, and I have changed nothing in it."

The truth was far less dramatic, but when it came to building his image for the German people, Hitler had little use for the truth.

Hitler, sitting on the far right, with regimental comrades in 1914

© Photo by Roger Viollet/Getty Images

A TASTE OF WAR

Hitler's wartime service was unspectacular, but was later embellished by Nazi propaganda

Written by David Foley

Hitler, like many young men in 1914, was excited by the prospect of war. A photograph from August 1914 apparently shows a young Hitler rejoicing in Munich after the declaration of war. It is not certain that the picture is actually of the future Führer, but there is a strong resemblance.

In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler would claim to have seen the war as a chance to put right a lot of the ills of the world. He had been disgusted as a young man at the triumph of capitalism and the transformation of the world into "a mammoth department store". This sort of business-oriented world sickened him and he longed to have been born into an earlier age.

As it was, he had been resigned to living his life "along peaceful and orderly lines". As far as his account can be believed, he had been excited by the Boer War and the Russo-Japanese War, and was filled with joy when the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand led to open conflict.

Many of the men who shared his enthusiasm would change their opinions after their experiences in battle, especially in the trenches of the Western Front, but Hitler was destined for an easier war than most. Taking his place in the ranks of the List Regiment (so called because of its original commanding officer, Colonel Julius List), Hitler embarked on his six weeks of basic training before he was sent to the front.

It was a sobering experience. The first thing Hitler realised was that his enemies were not as weak as he had been led to believe. In one of the few examples where his later recollections in *Mein Kampf* appear to be completely honest, he noted how this had given him a respect for the possibilities of propaganda. If this was indeed truthful, it was swimming in a sea of fabrications - Hitler and the Nazi Party were determined to depict his wartime experience in as favourable a light as possible. Merely doing his job competently (which he appears to have done) was not good enough. The Führer needed to have been a war hero, so the past was rewritten once more.

In battle at Ypres, Hitler witnessed the mass casualties that modern warfare generated. The List Regiment suffered heavy losses and this was directly responsible for Hitler's first and last promotion. With new recruits flooding the regiment, men with experience, however limited, were pushed up the ranks. Hitler was promoted to Private First Class in November 1914. He was then pulled out of the front lines to serve as a dispatch rider.

It is easy to dismiss this as cushy job, but there was still danger involved. Hitler was spared the grinding experience of regular front-line duty, and generally did his work a comfortable distance behind the trenches, but it was not a safe environment. In December 1914, he was one of a group of dispatch riders who carried a wounded officer off the battlefield, winning himself the Iron Cross in the process.

The Nazi propaganda machine would later insist that this had been a solo act of courage, and Hitler showed a willingness to lie even during the war, sometimes writing to acquaintances and describing involvement in actions where his regiment had not been engaged. Any testimony that ran counter to this was suppressed by the Nazis, but one regimental comrade did manage to write a newspaper article in 1932 in which he claimed that "the front experience of Private Hitler consisted more in the consumption of artificial honey and tea than of participation in any combat."

Comrades with good things to say about Hitler were hard to find, mostly because he was a loner. He would spend time with fellow dispatch riders but was not interested in cultivating friendships with the front-line soldiers. This would later present the Nazis with a problem, which they circumvented in the 1920s by encouraging regimental comrades to 'remember' favourable examples of Hitler's conduct.

Hitler also had no interest in mixing with the civilian population when on leave. There were rumours of sexual liaisons with both men and women, including a story that he had got a young woman pregnant, but there is nothing concrete to back up these claims. Perhaps most interestingly, he had no interest whatsoever in leadership. The man who would later take hold of a nation made absolutely no applications for promotion during his service and remained a Private First Class until the end of the war.

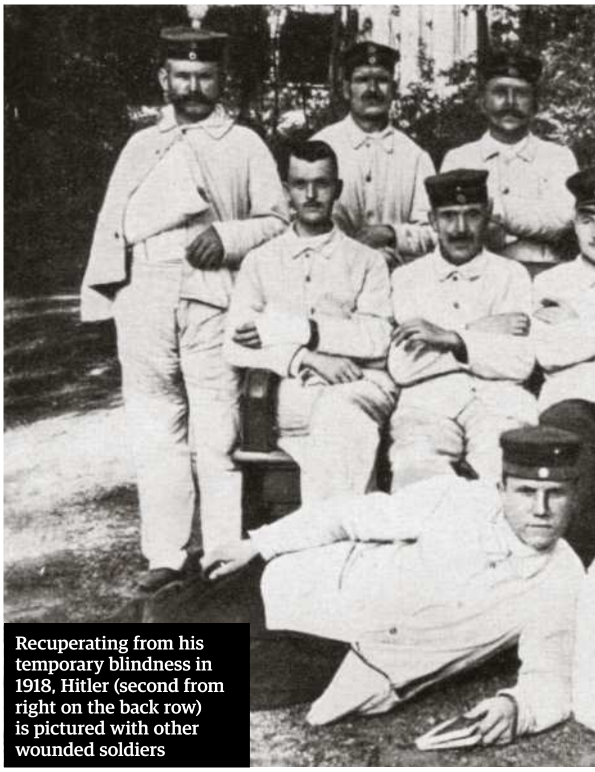
In October 1916 Hitler received proof that the life of a dispatch rider was not without danger, in the form of a shell splinter that hit him in the leg while two miles behind the front lines. The wound was serious enough to require hospitalisation and a lengthy convalescence, but it is unlikely that it actually halved his number of testicles, as the popular song of World War II claimed – although this rumour was apparently confirmed following the autopsy carried out by the Russians after his suicide, in reality his body was badly burned and the autopsy is not generally trusted.

While recovering in hospital, Hitler later claimed that he was appalled at the number of Jews who were dodging service by either taking up administration positions or feigning injuries more serious than they were. Once more, this appears to have been a fabrication, concocted for the pages of *Mein Kampf*, and in any case it was grossly inaccurate – the Jewish community in Germany actually suffered disproportionately high casualty rates in combat.

By March 1917, he was back in action as a dispatch rider and he soon won his second medal, the Iron Cross 1st Class. This was not for any single act, but rather as recognition for his lengthy service, as the commendation made clear. He had played

> "The man who would later take hold of a nation made absolutely no applications for promotion during his service"

Dated March 1936, as Chancellor of Germany, Hitler salutes injured veterans from World War I


Recuperating from his temporary blindness in 1918, Hitler (second from right on the back row) is pictured with other wounded soldiers

© Photo by Hulton Archive/Getty Images

© Photo by Hulton Archive/Getty Images

SERVING GERMANY

Although born an Austrian, Hitler had no doubts which country he wanted to fight for in the Great War

Hitler's eagerness to serve in the army appears to have been genuine. "I am not ashamed to acknowledge today that I was carried away by the enthusiasm of the moment," he said of his reaction to the declaration of war, "and that I sank down upon my knees and thanked Heaven out of the fullness of my heart."

Despite having been judged unfit to serve Austro-Hungary, he was accepted by the Bavarian Army and joined up with enthusiasm. He claimed to have no inclination to fight in support of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, seeing the Germans as his people and their cause as his cause.

Later embellishing his story (as always) he would claim that, being an Austrian, he had written to King Ludwig III for permission to join his armed forces. In fact, no such permission was needed and many Austrians fought for Germany during the war. Hitler was not as unique as he would later make out, although his determination to serve in the German Army is undeniable.

© Photo by Hulton Archive/Getty Images

Hitler in his German field uniform, believed to be around 1915

The motivations for his decision are laid out in *Mein Kampf*. "I believed that it was not a case of Austria fighting to get satisfaction from Serbia," he noted, "but rather a case of Germany fighting for her own existence." Whatever was really going through his head, it seems he shared a common worry – that it would all be over before he had chance to play his part. The brief basic training period soon passed, however, and he was delighted when "kind fortune permitted me to take my place in that heroic struggle among the nations."

a part in the capture of a group of French soldiers, but the citation for his award mentioned that "as a dispatch runner he was a model of sangfroid and grit". In an ironic twist, the officer who recommended Hitler for the medal was Jewish, but Hugo Gutmann was leaned on by the Nazis after the war to keep quiet about the episode. The party did not want anyone to know that Hitler had been on good terms with a Jewish officer.

On 14 October 1918, as the war staggered to its conclusion, Hitler was gassed at Comines and was temporarily blinded. Interestingly, this appears to have been a psychological reaction to the experience – his eyes were not actually damaged, although the mustard gas had burnt the skin around them. Despite this, Hitler's blindness appears to have been genuine and his doctor, Edmund Forster, employed psychological treatment. Explaining to Hitler how most people would be left permanently blind by such an injury, he added that exceptionally strong characters could will themselves to see again. Hitler apparently believed this referred to him, and over the course of ten days his vision gradually returned.

This moment of psychological weakness was too much for the Nazis to accept, and Dr Forster was leaned on so heavily to keep quiet about the incident that he eventually committed suicide. The suppression of this particular story, of course, only lends it credibility.

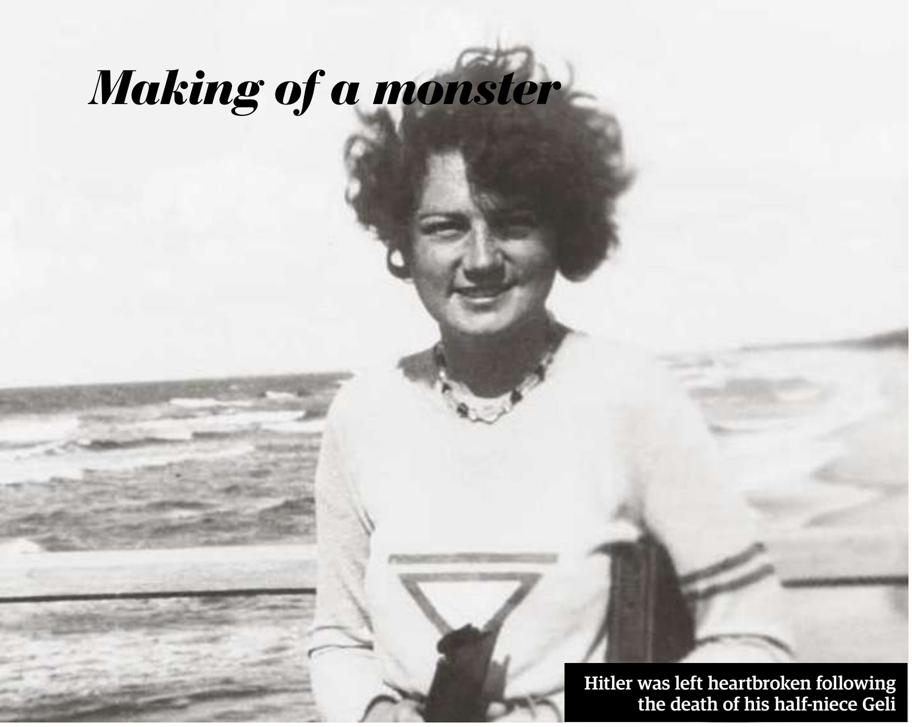
Hitler's war service had been unexceptional, but he had performed his duties and been recognised for that. This was not enough when it came time to write his story. His recollections in *Mein Kampf* focus on life in the front lines, of which he had only a brief experience. However, some of his comments ring true, such as the memory of how, after just four days in the trenches, the regiment had changed in outlook and even appearance. Teenagers, he remembered, now walked like grown men following their introduction to modern warfare. It also seems reasonable to take another of his comments at face value: "A feeling of horror replaced the romantic fighting spirit".

©Wiki

Hitler with his dog Fuchsl and two other German soldiers

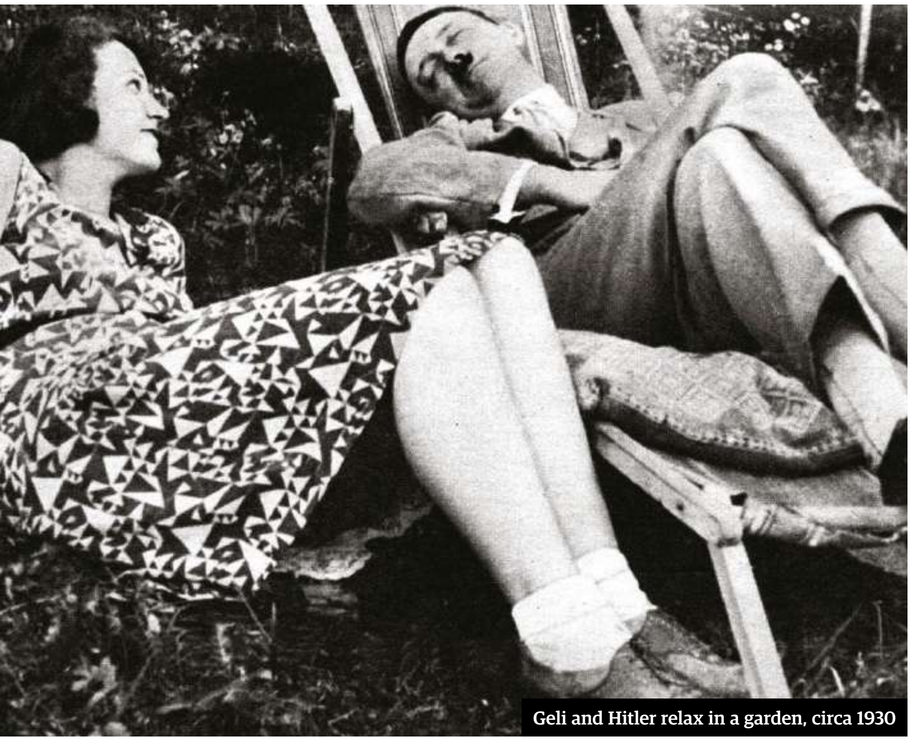
While Hitler recovered from his temporary blindness, the war ended, to his bitter disappointment. For most, it was a longed-for moment, but Hitler described it as "the frightful hour". Defeat was bad enough, but he later claimed to have been particularly incensed by the way in which the war had been handled, especially in the field of propaganda, where he believed that French, British and American efforts had been far more effective. It was in this arena, rather than on the battlefield, that he saw the Germans as having been completely outclassed, and it was a lesson he would not forget. "More than once I was tortured by the thought that if Providence had put the conduct of German propaganda into my hands … the outcome of the struggle might have been different," he remembered.

Just over 20 years after the end of World War I, he would be able to put that bold claim to the test, with terrifying results.



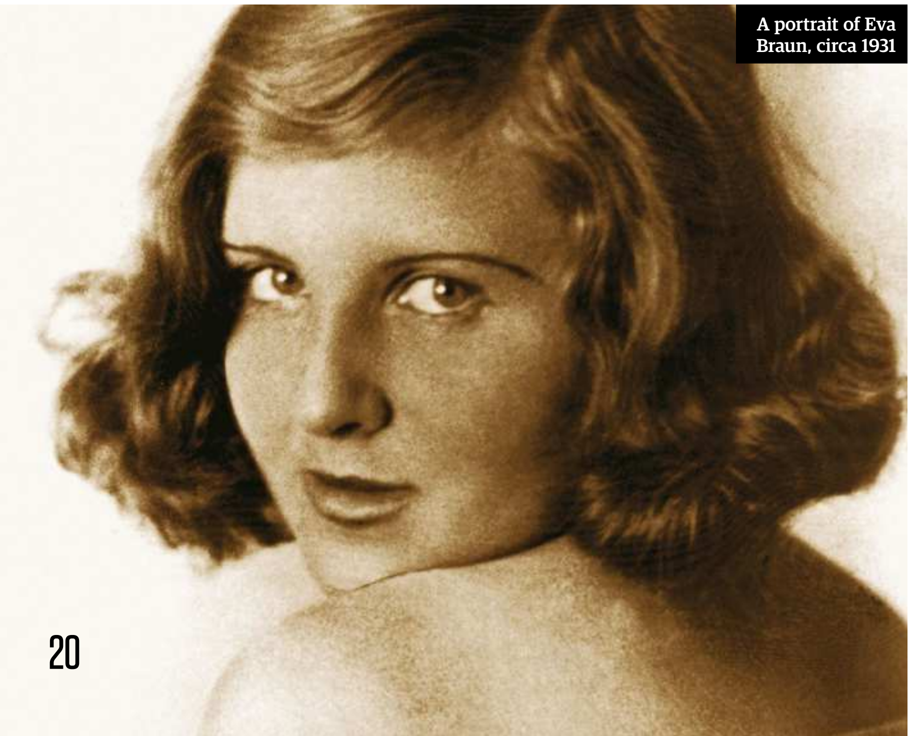
Hitler was left heartbroken following the death of his half-niece Geli

© Getty / Ullstein bild Dtl.



Geli and Hitler relax in a garden, circa 1930

© Alamy



A portrait of Eva Braun, circa 1931

© Alamy

One of the most famous photographs of Eva and Hitler shows how close their relationship was

©Bettmann/Getty Images

HITLER IN LOVE

Uncover the lives of the women who fell in love with the most hated man of the 20th century

Written by Katharine Marsh

It was a Saturday morning when the body was found face down on the floor in the Munich apartment. A bullet wound near the 23-year-old's heart had killed her, and the 6.35mm Walther pistol lay on the sofa nearby. It had belonged to the man who owned the apartment - a man who was known across Germany and who was beginning to garner attention around the world. His name was Adolf Hitler, and the apparent suicide of his half-niece would change him forever.

The young woman was Geli Raubal, and she had been full of life. A music student, she was known among Hitler's inner circle as an "enchantress" and a "princess", and the burgeoning politician often had her on his arm at events, eager to show off his half-sister's daughter to all who would pay attention. Neither had thought that their relationship would come to such an abrupt end - after all, their affair had started inconspicuously enough.

When Hitler was 39, he rented a house in Obersalzberg, near Berchtesgaden in Bavaria, and asked his half-sister, Angela, to be his housekeeper. Angela obliged and brought her daughter, also called Angela but better known as Geli and in her late teens, with her. Hitler was a goner. Apparently head over heels in love with his half-niece, they became fast friends and constant companions. They took romantic walks in the Bavarian mountains hand in hand, ate at restaurants and even attended meetings together. It could have been a perfect love story if they hadn't been related, but that was the problem. Geli's maternal grandfather was Hitler's father. That didn't seem to matter to Hitler, though - he was obsessed with this girl in her late teens.

In 1929, Hitler moved back to Munich, taking a flat on Prinzregentenstraße and bringing Geli along with him. The rumours of a relationship between the two of them skyrocketed, but neither party seemed to care for a while. Ernst Hanfstaengl, a close friend of Hitler's, commented that Geli was the "one woman in [Hitler's] life who went some way towards curing his impotence", and the pair seemed good together. Hitler enjoyed showing his half-niece off, and Geli didn't mind the attention. The soon-to-be politician even encouraged his paramour to receive weapons training, and insisted that she carried a loaded pistol with her for

Geli poses with two of Hitler's dogs in front of Berchtesgaden, where they lived before moving to Munich

© INTERFOTO / Alamy

protection. Feeling like she was in a Western, Geli loved it. But what was lying underneath the surface of this seemingly loving relationship?

Violence, jealousy, aggression and perhaps sadism were all part and parcel. According to both Hanfstaengl and Otto Strasser, Geli had complained about the strange and downright disgusting things she had been asked to do in the bedroom, and she was looking for a way out of Uncle Alf's grip. Hitler wouldn't let her see other people – although apparently that didn't necessarily stop her when he was away. Rumours spread that she was sleeping with Emil Maurice, Hitler's chauffeur. They weren't far off the truth. Geli told her friend Henriette, daughter of Hitler's official photographer Heinrich Hoffmann, "Being loved is boring, but to love a man, you know, to love him – that's what life is about. And when you can love and be loved at the same time, it's paradise." She wasn't speaking of her uncle – those words were all about Maurice.

But there were other whispers around Munich about what Geli was up to. Some evidence suggests that she was in a relationship with a man in Vienna, and that she planned to meet him there and they were to marry until Hitler put a stop to it, apparently with the support of his half-sister, Geli's mother. Some said that the man was a Jew, and that she was pregnant with his child. In fact, the day before Geli's body was found, that was what Hitler and Geli's latest argument had been about.

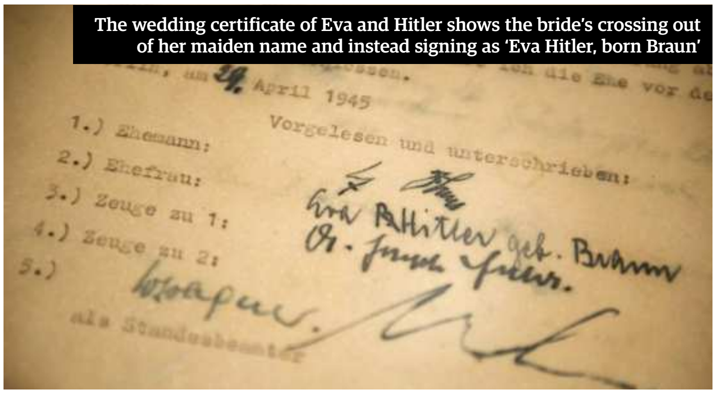
"You say you have to go to Vienna? Is it to see that filthy Jew, the one who claims to be a singing teacher? Is that it? Have you been seeing him secretly again? Have you forgotten I forbade you to have anything to do with him? Tell me the truth now. Why do you want to go to Vienna?" Hitler had roared. Geli's response was simple: "I have to go to Vienna, Uncle Alf, because I'm going to have a baby."

Blazing rows weren't out of the ordinary for the pair – the neighbours didn't bat an eyelid. Hitler left for Hamburg that evening, off on the campaign trail, and Geli was desperate. She couldn't leave, not with both her uncle and her mother so vehemently against the idea, but staying was torturous.

Residents in neighbouring flats apparently heard a short cry that evening, but they thought nothing of it. Why would they? The terrible truth would be uncovered the next morning when Georg Winter, the husband of the housekeeper, found the door to the room locked. He opened it with a screwdriver, only to find the 23-year-old, once so vivacious, face down on the floor. Near her was an unfinished letter addressed to someone in Vienna, detailing how she would meet them there. Only she would never make it.

Geli's death is still a mystery today. Had she killed herself, as everyone believed? Nazi spin doctors came out in force claiming that she had killed herself because she was "nervous" about an upcoming music recital, but she was given a Catholic funeral, a rite that was denied to those who committed suicide, and was buried at the Zentralfriedhof Cemetery in Vienna on 23 September 1931. And why would she start writing a letter saying she'd meet someone in Vienna, only to end her life halfway through?

There are some who saw her death as an accident – perhaps she had been playing with her uncle's pistol when it suddenly went off, the bullet tearing into her chest. Maybe in the shock she had thrown it onto the sofa before sinking to the ground, her life slipping away from her. A few people came up with the idea that a jealous woman had come into the flat during the night, hellbent on killing her – the Nazi Party was particularly keen on this story.



The wedding certificate of Eva and Hitler shows the bride's crossing out of her maiden name and instead signing as 'Eva Hitler, born Braun'

am 29. April 1945

Vorgelesen und unterschrieben:

1.) Ehemann:
2.) Ehefrau: Eva ~~B~~ Hitler geb. Braun
3.) Zeuge zu 1: Dr. Joseph Goebbels.
4.) Zeuge zu 2:
5.) Wagner.
als Standesbeamter

Hitler was away that night, but that didn't stop rumours spreading that he had done it. He just couldn't let Geli go to Vienna, or have the baby she was supposed to be carrying. Others claimed that he had hired someone to murder her and make it look like an accident.

Whatever the truth, the aftermath of her death was certainly shady. Geli's body was taken for an autopsy but disappeared out of a side door and was shipped off to Vienna with no questions asked. The corpse was gone before the Monday morning papers. If Hitler's political career was to gather speed, he needed the scandal of a woman dying under his roof to shrink away into the background.

But despite public appearances, Hitler was distraught. Geli's death left him heartbroken – there was a hole in his life where the vivacious and confident young woman had been. After seeing her face splashed across every newspaper, he couldn't bear it any more and so headed to an isolated cottage on the shore of Tegernsee, Bavaria. There he ranted and raved to Rudolf Hess, yelling about how his political career was over and that his life was no longer worth living. According to one story, Hess had to grab a pistol out of his friend's hand before he killed himself.

Geli may not have been Hitler's first infatuation, and certainly not the first of his lovers to attempt suicide (although very little is known about these earlier women), but it was her death that affected him the most, with some even blaming it for some of Hitler's darker policies. Nonetheless, time heals most wounds, and Hitler would soon move on. It just so happened that his next love would be someone he had already met.

A photo taken on 31 December 1939 at a New Year's party at the Berghof shows Eva in the front row, standing right next to Hitler three in from the left

© Galerie Bilderwelt/ Getty Images

> "Geli's body was taken for an autopsy but disappeared out of a side door and was shipped off to Vienna"

Hitler on Germany's North Sea coast with Geli and her mother Angela (his half-sister)

© Ullstein bild Dtl./ Getty Images

THE OTHER WOMEN

Meet the others who supposedly caught the eye of the Führer

STEFANIE RABATSCH

A young Austrian woman, Stefanie caught the eye of Hitler around 1905. His heart soared whenever she smiled at him, but he was crushed whenever he was ignored. While the two never met, Hitler's close friend August Kubizek claims Hitler planned to kidnap her, and he sent her an anonymous love letter asking her to wait for him. Three years later, Stefanie was married to another man.

CHARLOTTE LOBJOIE

The mother of Jean-Marie Loret, who claimed to be Hitler's son, the story goes that Charlotte, the daughter of a butcher, met the Führer when he was posted in Wavrin, France, during World War I. However, the parentage was later disproved after Charlotte's death.

ERNA HANFSTAENGL

Erna, the elder sister of one of Hitler's closest friends, was plagued by whispers. After the failed Beer Hall Putsch, it was said that she and the future dictator had hidden together in Uffing, with more rumours claiming they were to be married. While they were possibly lovers at this time, Erna was later involved in a plot to overthrow the Führer.

MARIA REITER

She was 16 when she met Hitler while the soon-to-be Führer was 37. They began to date and the relationship seemed to be getting serious – until Hitler broke it off in February 1927. Sinking into depression, Maria attempted suicide, only to be saved in the nick of time by her brother-in-law.

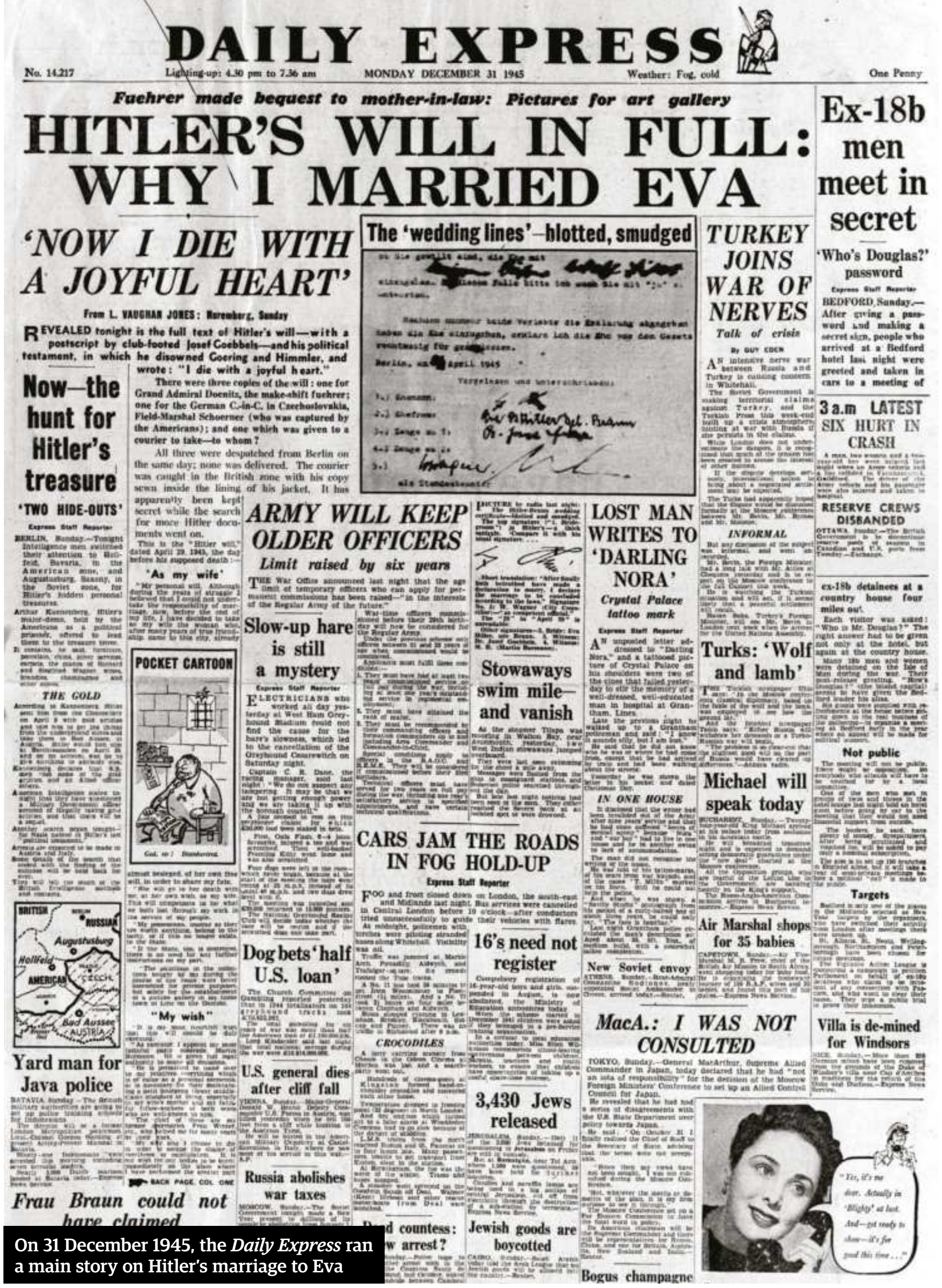
UNITY MITFORD

A Brit known for her support of fascism, Unity was delighted to be accepted into Hitler's inner circle. It is unknown if they had a sexual relationship – some claim they did, while others state that Unity was jealous of Eva – but Hitler extolled Unity's Aryan virtues and was happy to show off the fascist Englishwoman around Germany.

Hitler and Eva pose with their dogs at the Berghof

©Wiki

Making of a monster



DAILY EXPRESS

No. 14,217 Lighting-up: 4.30 pm to 7.36 am MONDAY DECEMBER 31 1945 Weather: Fog, cold One Penny

Fuehrer made bequest to mother-in-law: Pictures for art gallery

HITLER'S WILL IN FULL: WHY I MARRIED EVA

'NOW I DIE WITH A JOYFUL HEART'

From L. VAUGHAN JONES: Nuremberg, Sunday

REVEALED tonight is the full text of Hitler's will—with a postscript by club-footed Josef Goebbels—and his political testament, in which he disowned Goering and Himmler, and wrote: "I die with a joyful heart."

There were three copies of the will: one for Grand Admiral Doenitz, the make-shift fuehrer; one for the German C.-in-C. in Czechoslovakia, Field-Marshal Schoerner (who was captured by the Americans); and one which was given to a courier to take—to whom?

All three were despatched from Berlin on the same day; none was delivered. The courier was caught in the British zone with his copy sewn inside the lining of his jacket. It has apparently been kept secret while the search for more Hitler documents went on.

'As my wife'

Now—the hunt for Hitler's treasure

'TWO HIDE-OUTS'

THE GOLD

POCKET CARTOON

The 'wedding lines'—blotted, smudged

Berlin, am April 1945

ARMY WILL KEEP OLDER OFFICERS

Limit raised by six years

THE War Office announced last night that the age limit of temporary officers who can apply for permanent commissions has been raised—"in the interests of the Regular Army of the future."

Slow-up hare is still a mystery

Express Staff Reporter

ELECTRICIANS who worked all day yesterday at West Ham Greyhound Stadium could not find the cause for the hare's slowness, which led to the cancellation of the Greyhound Cesarewitch on Saturday night.

Stowaways swim mile—and vanish

LOST MAN WRITES TO 'DARLING NORA'

Crystal Palace tattoo mark

Express Staff Reporter

AN unposted letter addressed to "Darling Nora," and a tattooed picture of Crystal Palace on his shoulders were two of the clues that failed yesterday to stir the memory of a well-dressed, well-educated man in hospital at Grantham, Lincs.

IN ONE HOUSE

TURKEY JOINS WAR OF NERVES

Talk of crisis

By GUY EDEN

AN intensive nerve war between Russia and Turkey is causing concern in Whitehall.

INFORMAL

Turks: 'Wolf and lamb'

Michael will speak today

Ex-18b men meet in secret

'Who's Douglas?' password

Express Staff Reporter

BEDFORD, Sunday.—After giving a password and making a secret sign, people who arrived at a Bedford hotel last night were greeted and taken in cars to a meeting of ex-18b detainees at a country house four miles out.

Each visitor was asked: "Who is Mr. Douglas?" The right answer had to be given not only at the hotel, but again at the country house.

Not public

Targets

3 a.m LATEST SIX HURT IN CRASH

RESERVE CREWS DISBANDED

CARS JAM THE ROADS IN FOG HOLD-UP

Express Staff Reporter

FOG and frost closed down on London, the south-east and Midlands last night. Bus services were cancelled in Central London before 10 o'clock—after conductors tried unsuccessfully to guide their vehicles with flares.

CROCODILES

16's need not register

Dog bets 'half U.S. loan'

U.S. general dies after cliff fall

Russia abolishes war taxes

Yard man for Java police

"My wish"

BACK PAGE, COL. ONE

Frau Braun could not have claimed

3,430 Jews released

Jewish goods are boycotted

New Soviet envoy

Air Marshal shops for 35 babies

MacA.: I WAS NOT CONSULTED

TOKYO, Sunday.—General MacArthur, Supreme Allied Commander in Japan, today declared that he had "not an iota of responsibility" for the decision of the Moscow Foreign Ministers' Conference to set up an Allied Control Council for Japan.

Villa is de-mined for Windsors

Bogus champagne

BRITISH
RUSSIAN
Augustusburg
Hollfeld
AMERICAN
CZECH.
Bad Aussee
AUSTRIA
"Yes, it's me dear. Actually in 'Blighty' at last. And—get ready to show—it's for good this time . . ."

© Getty Images

On 31 December 1945, the *Daily Express* ran a main story on Hitler's marriage to Eva

In 1929, Heinrich Hoffmann had a young assistant in his studio. Just 17, she was a keen worker and eager to please as both an assistant and a model. Then, one November day, Eva Braun's life changed forever. There at the door of the photography studio was a man who was introduced as 'Herr Wolf', and the rest, as they say, was history.

It's impossible to know much about the early years of their relationship as all of Hitler's personal correspondence was burned the week before his death in 1945. What we can infer, though, is that she became jealous – after all, she was only 17 and the man she wanted was obsessed with another woman: Geli. His half-niece took up his spare time, but that didn't stop Eva from flirting with Hitler, and he brought her gifts when he visited the photography studio, and even sometimes took her to the opera.

In 1930, things seemed to be going Eva's way. Hitler invited her to dinners at Osteria Bavaria, his favourite restaurant, along with others from his inner circle, and it's thought that while Hitler was jealous of the company Geli was keeping, the feeling may have been mutual. Theirs was a strange, mixed-up relationship, after all. The man who was showering her with affection – however grotesque his bedroom requests may have been – was shifting his attention to a girl just one or two years her junior.

Hitler's 'type' was clear – he once commented: "A girl of 18 to 20 is as malleable as wax. It should be possible for a man … to stamp his own imprint on her. That's all the woman asks for." He didn't like girls who argued with him, or who were more intelligent than him, and with both of his main relationships being with girls in their late teens and early 20s, it certainly seems that dominance was important to him. At the beginning, Geli didn't resist, and neither did Eva.

"With both of his main relationships being with girls in their late teens and early 20s, it certainly seems that dominance was important to him"

After Geli's death it seemed as though Hitler would never be able to get over her. Her room in Munich was never touched while the dictator lived, and his grief was deep and real. But it didn't last for long. Eva, still living in Munich, was about to turn 20, and she was eager to grow up. She spent her nights at cafes, nightclubs and the cinema, staying out until the early morning. She was enjoying everything the city had to offer, but there was just one problem – she was still obsessed with Hitler.

Eva never let up in her flirting, and eventually it paid off. An invitation to the Troubadour, one of Hitler's favourite cafes, turned into more nights at the opera. Then it was a full-blown affair – or so we think. Any primary evidence of their relationship – letters, documents, photographs – were destroyed in 1945, so figuring out what happened has been a lot of guesswork and interviews with Hitler's inner circle after the war. For instance, it's unclear if their relationship had a sexual element or not (although Eva's biographer claims they were definitely sexually active), and we'll never know just how emotionally attached they were to one another.

What we do know, however, is that while Eva didn't like to take money from her lover, she did end up with a house in Munich, as well as apartments at the Berghof and the Old Reich Chancellery. We also know that she wasn't a member of the Nazi Party, although she must have agreed with their ideas as she has been photographed at at least one rally.

But the relationship did cause one problem. Hitler had a very specific image that he had cultivated, and that was one of a lonesome and

The shopfront of Heinrich Hoffmann's photography studio in Munich where Hitler met Braun

Eva was used to posing for the camera, but it's something she only really did behind closed doors as Hitler gained more power

© Getty Images

god-like man who had sacrificed his personal life for the good of his country. He was married to the Fatherland, not a 20-something-year-old Bavarian. As such, they were never seen together in public. Hardly any pictures were taken of the two of them together, unless they were away from the public eye in places like the Berghof.

The Eva we remember today was a happy, blonde-haired girl who enjoyed the frivolous things in life, but her diary spins another story. The only part that survives covers 6 February to 28 May 1935, but it tells the tale of a woman who had given everything to the man she loved, only to receive nothing in return. It tore her apart, and she spiralled deeper and deeper into despair. Leaving Hitler wasn't an option – as far as we know, it didn't even occur to her – but she saw another way out.

It wasn't the first time that Eva had attempted suicide – there had been an attempt in 1932, although the event had been covered up – but the seriousness of the situation cannot be understated. Eva was clearly reaching the end of her patience with Germany's chancellor, and it seemed as though the overdose of sleeping pills provided a wake-up call for him. They became closer, even though Hitler disapproved of her smoking and use of make-up.

Eva stayed away from politics, which suited Hitler just fine – he had never wanted a woman to interfere with his work. However, since the end of World War II there has been some discussion about just how much the Führer's mistress knew about the policies and atrocities that took place under Nazi rule. Did she know about the Holocaust? Did she realise what was going on in Germany and beyond? Regardless, her loyalty to her lover was absolute, even when their final test came.

As Berlin crumbled around him, Hitler and his inner circle took refuge in the Führerbunker under the Reich Chancellery. There they commanded the final weeks and days of the war effort as the Soviets closed in on the city. Hitler had ordered Eva to leave Berlin, make a break for freedom, but she refused. Instead, she joined the Führer in his underground hideout, unwilling to leave him, even at the cost of her own life.

In the early hours of 29 April 1945, Eva's dream was finally realised – she married the man she loved as they sheltered from the enemy. The ceremony was conducted by Walther Wagner, a minor official from the Propaganda Ministry, with the marriage certificate signed by Joseph Goebbels and Martin Bormann. It was a reward for Eva's near-unwavering loyalty, and as she signed the marriage document, she wrote "Eva B" before crossing it out and writing "Eva Hitler, born Braun".

The intent had always been that the newlyweds would die in a double suicide after the wedding; Hitler wrote in his will that "at her [Eva's] own desire she goes as my wife with me into death". They had one day together as man and wife before they made their way to their private room. There, they took cyanide, and the Führer shot himself in the head with a 7.65mm Walther pistol.

Eva had made it clear that she would follow her lover to the ends of the Earth, and she did so. Hitler had a pull on her, no matter how toxic their relationship may have been in the beginning, or indeed at all. What did matter was that they left the world together, believing in the dream of the Third Reich. But it does make one wonder – if Geli had still been alive, would it have been her lying next to the Führer? Hitler's hold over these two women was extraordinary, even if it was for the worse.

© Getty Images

AN UNANSWERED QUESTION

Historians have speculated about Hitler's sexuality for years, but where's the evidence?

He was married to the Fatherland. Adolf Hitler had been put on this Earth to bring freedom to the German people, and there was no time for him to be having fun and frolicking around with women. At least, that's the image he created for himself.

Hitler had his fair share of women in his life – Geli and Eva were the most famous, but there were others, too. However, as far as the bedroom was concerned, some historians have differing opinions about what was really going on. There are some who put forward the argument that the dictator was actually asexual – that is, he didn't participate in sex. But it doesn't take much to disprove this theory; Geli was so disgusted by the sex acts she was made to perform that it put distance between her and her half-uncle, while Eva's biographer claims they had a very active sex life. This isn't the only school of thought, though.

©Wiki

August Kubizek, one of the men who allegedly had an affair with Hitler

There are a number of historians past and present who believe that the Führer may have been homosexual, or at least repressing strong homosexual tendencies. Lothar Machtan, a German historian and writer, believes so. One partner he suggests is August Kubizek, who had lived with Hitler in Vienna in 1908, but this isn't mentioned at all in Kubizek's memoirs. Instead he talks about how they both fell for the same girl, Stefanie Rabatsch. Machtan doesn't stop there – he also claims that Hitler had an affair with a fellow soldier during World War I, although no evidence has been found to back up these claims.

DEVELOPING A CREDO

It took time for Hitler to build the belief system that would carry him to power

Written by David Foley

Hitler's political beliefs had been largely invisible prior to World War I. Now, in the apocalyptic atmosphere of post-war Germany, he took on board a number of influences and assembled a personal belief system that was often as chaotic as the world around him. In *Mein Kampf* he would claim to have had clear opinions at a much earlier stage, but in reality he was a bewildered figure in the immediate aftermath of the conflict. Certainty would come later, and even then there would be little or no originality to his thinking.

Even before the war ended, Germany was falling into crisis. A socialist republic was set up in Bavaria on 8 November 1918, and two days later the kaiser abdicated. Hitler had been badly shaken by the German surrender, later claiming he felt that the country had been betrayed by its leaders, not let down by its soldiers. "Was it for this the soldiers died?" he asked, rhetorically. "Has all this been done in order to enable a gang of despicable criminals to lay hands on the Fatherland?" He would assert that he blamed Jews and Bolsheviks for the betrayal, but his opinions had actually not yet developed as the war drew to a close. They would form in the years that followed.

Friedrich Ebert, leader of the Social Democrats, brought stability to the nation by dealing with the army and the trade unions, but it was precarious. The Spartacist rising in early January 1919, two weeks before scheduled elections, was organised by the KPD, the German Communist Party. War veterans formed Freikorps to resist the attempted revolution and while it was suppressed, it did prove that brutality could win in politics as well as on the battlefield, and Hitler duly took note. He didn't join the Freikorps, but remained in the army for 18 months after the war.

A left-wing Revolutionary Republic had been established in Munich immediately after the war, headed by Kurt Eisner. His assassination in February 1919 (by right-wing extremists) created a power vacuum that the communists quickly moved to fill, establishing a Soviet Republic. Remarkably, given his later hatred for the Bolsheviks, Hitler acted in support of this communist body. He was elected as a representative by one of the soldier councils

Hitler addresses the Sturmabteilung near Munich in 1923

© Photo by Philipp Kester/ullstein bild via Getty Images

encouraged by the Munich Soviet Republic and he cooperated with the communists in this role.

However, the experiment was short-lived. An ad hoc army of some 30,000 coalesced to bring it down, once more with great brutality. The lesson had been repeated – political power could not be maintained without physical strength.

Following this brief flirtation with the left, Hitler veered quickly to the right, and he was about to be exposed to a number of influences that would have a profound effect on his early political views.

Nationalism rising

Showing an interest for the first time in something other than art or opera, Hitler became a vocal attendant at lectures on economics and politics at the university in Munich. Their basic message was generally the same, with blame for the state of the nation being placed on the Jews and the Bolsheviks. Having been made an instruction officer by the army, he also taught soldiers, many of whom were prisoners of war returning home after captivity. Hitler embraced the rhetoric and discovered, both through his contributions to discussions after lectures and through his own teaching, that he had a flair for oratory. "I was now able to confirm what I had hitherto mostly felt," he later recalled, "namely, that I had a talent for public speaking."

The Treaty of Versailles piled more misery and shame on Germany. The country was greatly weakened by the loss of millions of citizens in ceded territory. Colonies, the navy and the air force were all forfeited, and Germany had to agree to the 'war guilt clause', meaning it shouldered the blame for starting the conflict. Hitler was angered at the harshness of the terms, but he also knew what great propaganda value it could offer.

It took years for Hitler to mould the Nazi Party into his desired image, but once he did it became a terrifying force

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"He may have been impressed by some of the leading figures in the Thule Society, but they were equally impressed by him"

This coincided with his exposure to extreme right-wing elements. The Thule Society, an anti-Semitic group in Germany, and the 'White Russians', exiles who saw the Jews as the main forces behind the revolution in Russia, sang similar tunes. In September 1919 Hitler read *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a fabricated document purporting to detail a Jewish conspiracy to control the world. By the end of the year, Hitler had absorbed nationalistic ideas from a variety of sources, including ones of racial purity. Most of the influences he was exposed to were deeply anti-Semitic and Hitler embraced this philosophy, coming to see the Jews and the Bolsheviks as equal threats to Germany.

It is interesting to note that Hitler was also able to see through his political bias – he recognised that the Russian Revolution had been well staged and saw how its methods could be employed. His ends would be drastically different, but the means could be very similar.

At the same time, he was beginning to make a name for himself. He may have been impressed by some of the leading figures in the Thule Society, but they were equally impressed by him. Dietrich Eckhart, for one, saw Hitler as an upcoming force in German politics and anybody who heard the man speak came away impressed with his passion and gift for rhetoric.

This new-found power to grab and hold the attention of his audience coincided with the hardening of his anti-Semitic notions. Hitler was descending into a truly dark place, as proved by a letter he wrote in September 1919. Although many of his later 'recollections' in *Mein Kampf* are suspect, this letter is a snapshot of a moment in time, where his belief system was solidifying. He referred

Anton Drexler, founder of the Nazi Party and Hitler admirer

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to the Jews as an “alien race” and claimed that “their dance around the golden calf is becoming a merciless struggle for all those possessions we prize most highly on Earth”.

Soldier to politician

At the same time there was lingering bitterness among former soldiers, encapsulated in the ‘stab in the back’ myth, which held that the fighting men had been betrayed by the politicians at home and had not actually been defeated. Prominent in the support of this, unsurprisingly, was the former commander-in-chief, Erich Ludendorff, who added the belief that Jewish conspirators were manoeuvring in the background to provoke a second great conflict for their own ends.

Still in the army at the end of 1919, Hitler found himself reporting on the activities of the German Workers’ Party. But when he attended a meeting, he couldn’t resist getting drawn into the debate that followed and turned heads with the power of his speaking. “My God,” the party leader, Anton Drexler, is reported as saying, “what a gob he’s got!” Drexler was so impressed he asked Hitler to join the organisation that would morph into the Nazi Party.

Though not there at the actual birth of the organisation, Hitler made out that he had been very close to it, claiming to have been given a membership number of seven. In actual fact, he was the 55th person to join the party, but his membership card quoted 555, in an attempt to make it seem like the party was growing more quickly than it actually was. By January 1920 he was addressing crowds of thousands, and he was clearly a man on the rise. By now drawing on dubious scientific ‘evidence’, Hitler believed that the Aryan race was superior to all others. The basic principals of Nazism were in place.

An early photo of Hitler from around 1922-1923

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Having transformed into the National Socialist German Workers’ Party in early 1920, Hitler himself wrote its 25-point policy document and modified the swastika design into the party logo. His rise was now unstoppable. He did not become the official leader of the Nazi Party until July 1921, but was the most important figure in the movement long before then, captivating large crowds with his hate-filled speeches.

Hitler had learned important lessons from the war and from his political experiences so far. A strong message was important, but a strong arm was equally so. Necessary to silence critics at meetings and cultivate an air of strength and menace, the Nazi Party was employing its own security forces by the end of 1921 in the form of the Sturmabteilung. With many war veterans among them, some of whom had fought in the trenches, the brown-shirted paramilitary force became the scourge of the communists and anyone else who dared raise a voice against Hitler and his party.

The Nazis now had a credo that played well to the masses, building on the bitterness and disillusionment of the post-war years. They also had a charismatic leader and the will to act with brutality against their opponents. The stage was set for their first grab for power.

Ernst Röhm, leader of the Sturmabteilung, the brutal enforcers of the Nazi Party

THE 25 POINTS

The basic Nazi ideology was spelled out in 1920, with Hitler its primary architect

Hitler unveiled his 25 points – a mix of racist theories, extreme nationalism and even some socialist elements – at a meeting on 24 February 1920. The first point was perhaps the most important, calling for the reunification of “all Germans in Greater Germany”, which provided the main motivation for the war that would follow less than two decades later.

Other points embraced a ‘victim’ culture, insisting the Germans should be treated as equals, which included turning over the Treaty of Versailles. Another vague point, which was again handy to use as an excuse for aggression against other nations, was the demand for an unspecified amount of “land and territory”, and Jews were barred from being citizens as “only a member of the race can be a citizen”. Immigration was to be halted, and anyone who had arrived since the start of World War I was to be expelled.

Less objectionable points included the expansion of benefits for the elderly and a demand for a division of profits of heavy industries. The state would revamp the education system and promote health and well-being. Rather perversely, freedom of religion was insisted upon within the state, but only “so long as they do not endanger its existence or oppose the moral senses of the Germanic race”.

The final point was chilling, demanding “the formation of a strong central power in the Reich”, as well as “unlimited authority of the central parliament”. The Nazis envisioned a Germany where only their voice would be heard.

Despite its ancient origins, the swastika became linked with Hitler

What was going on inside Hitler's mind has fascinated and frightened the world in equal measure

INSIDE THE MIND OF HITLER

Trying to understand Hitler has led historians and psychoanalysts down some interesting paths

Written by David Foley

It is natural, when considering a character as complex as Hitler, to wonder what was going on inside his head. Attempts to get into the mind of the Führer have been driven by various motivations. There is the idea that, if we could only understand him, we might prevent others from following in his footsteps. Before and during the war, there was a need among the Allies to know exactly what they were dealing with, and a better understanding of his motivations and impulses would have been beneficial. Finally, simple intellectual curiosity is a valid reason for trying to understand what made Hitler tick.

All of the motivations, however, come up against one simple problem. It is extremely difficult (some would say impossible) to analyse a personality without extensive time spent in direct conversation with that person. Nobody was able to get Hitler onto a psychiatrist's couch, so attempts to draw a picture of his mental state inevitably involve a lot of supposition and guesswork. This sort of approach is directly opposed to the way historians are trained to tackle their subject, so an entirely new form of history was created to fill the need.

The term 'psychohistory' was first used by Erik Erikson in 1958, but the concept wasn't new. As the theory developed into the 1970s, it encountered resistance from the traditional academic world. Attempting to explain an action due to deep-seated psychological factors is difficult and many believed that historians were simply not equipped to do it.

Many facets of history, however, would benefit greatly from an effective means of looking inside the minds of the people making the big decisions. All aspects of human life have a psychological element, but certain arenas are especially influenced. Foreign policy, for instance, is directly linked to psychology – brinkmanship, risk-threat analyses and interactions with foreign powers are heavily influenced. At its pinnacle is the concept of nuclear deterrent, in which a nation or individual needs to convince an opponent that there is an iron will to use weapons of mass destruction, while at the same time reassuring that rival that it isn't about to happen without provocation.

The field of psychohistory often involved a collaboration, which was an admission that no historian could tackle this without

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courting disaster. A partnership of historian and psychoanalyst could tackle both sides of the equation and potentially reach useful conclusions.

Before this was formalised into a firm concept, one of the most famous analyses ever undertaken took place. In 1943, the Office of Strategic Services (the OSS, forerunner of the CIA) decided that a psychological profile of Hitler would be of great benefit. His leadership style was often puzzling, his decisions regularly baffling. If the Allies could understand how he thought, and make realistic assessments of how he might act in the future, it would help bring the war to a conclusion, or to at least predict what Hitler might do next.

Walter C Langer, a psychiatrist, was tasked with producing the report, which was designated 'OSS Report, 138'. It looked into Hitler's background, drawing on every scrap of information that could be found on the Führer, including interviews with associates and former acquaintances, as well as others who had been near to Hitler during his rise to power. There was time pressure on the project, and it was actually presented in the form of a first draft - there had been no time for revision or editing. The report was then largely forgotten, and was not declassified until 1968. An edited version was published, in 1972, as *The Mind Of Adolf Hitler: The Secret Wartime Report*, and was hailed as a breakthrough study.

Langer had enlisted three psychoanalysts to help with his work (doctors Henry A Murray, Ernst Kris and Bertram D Lewin). Together they first compiled a sourcebook of the available evidence, which ran to almost a thousand pages. From this, they distilled the information and drew conclusions where possible. Where conclusions could not be drawn, the researchers speculated.

Hitler and Eva Braun. The Führer does not seem to have had a conventional relationship with any of the women in his life

> "Hitler, Waite argued, was plagued by guilt and doubt, which drove him to his most extreme acts and made him unconsciously crave failure"

The book was structured to present the data from a series of viewpoints: how Hitler viewed himself, how the German people viewed him, and so on. It also delved into the deeper, darker elements of his psyche to consider his sexuality and motivations, before finally offering a brief assessment of how his reign might end.

The first conclusion of the team was that Hitler was convinced of his own greatness, even as he stood on the verge of disaster. Various sources were quoted to back up this judgement, including direct statements from Hitler himself, such as: "I cannot be mistaken. What I do and say is historical."

Hitler also had a firm grasp of the importance of his legacy. He craved achieving a level of immortality by becoming so important that he could never be forgotten. Everything he oversaw, from buildings to armies, needed to be the most impressive ever created. He is believed to have made plans for a grand mausoleum, standing 700 feet high, and did not see death as the end of his story. "I know how to keep my hold on the people after I have passed on," he was quoted as saying. "My life shall not end in the mere form of death. It will, on the contrary, begin then." He spoke of passing the leadership mantle on to a successor, sometime in the 1950s.

This section of the report's analysis was directly contradicted by another study. The psychohistorian RGL Waite drew dramatically different conclusions from the same evidence in the 1970s. According to Waite, Hitler had no concept of handing over power to a successor, nor was he convinced of his own greatness. In fact, he was plagued by guilt and doubt, which is what drove him to his most extreme acts. By repeatedly emphasising

Walter C Langer believed Hitler tapped into an alternate personality when speaking and when he needed to make difficult decisions

HITLER AND HIS MOTHER

The Führer's relationship with his mother may have been deeper and darker than suspected

The theory that Hitler may have suffered from an Oedipal complex is familiar. In the OSS report, Walter C Langer suggested that this was partly because of the violence of his father. Clearly, having to watch his father abusing his mother would have been deeply traumatic for a young boy. There is no evidence, however, to back up the claim that Alois Hitler was an unusually violent man.

Corporal punishment was the norm at the time, so the young Hitler was almost certainly beaten from time to time, but there is no evidence of particularly severe assaults.

Despite this, his relationship with his mother is viewed as central to his personality. Many historians have suggested that incestuous feelings towards his mother were a key part of the complex cocktail of guilt that Hitler carried around with him. Langer's report also claimed that Hitler had shifted the love he had once felt for his mother onto his nation, and as such it was an incredibly strong, complex and irrational love. Langer pointed out how Hitler spoke of the "motherland", while Germans almost universally spoke of the "fatherland".

In this regard, Germany's defeat in World War I had been as painful to Hitler as the death of his mother. The break-up of his family was echoed in the break-up of the army, the place he had come to view as his home. Part of the reason why Hitler stayed in the army for so long after the war ended, according to Langer, was that he felt he simply had nowhere else to go.

Hitler's speeches were carefully created performances

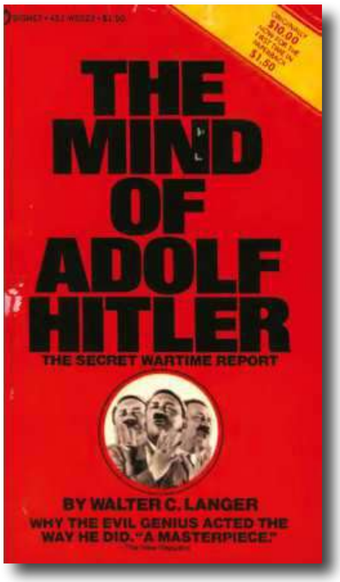
his worthiness in speeches, Waite argued, Hitler was actually betraying the fact that he was far from convinced. The same was revealed by his vitriolic attacks on those deemed unworthy, notably the Jews and Bolsheviks.

This guilt, Waite contended, led Hitler to unconsciously crave failure, as if he deserved it. A pattern can certainly be seen in Hitler's life - his failure to apply himself at school, his refusal to work harder for his second application to the art academy, his lamentable lack of planning for the Beer Hall Putsch. All suggest a self-saboteur at work, and these instances pale in comparison with his failure to destroy the British army at Dunkirk, his failure to subdue the Royal Air Force and invade Britain and his opening of an offensive against the Soviet Union on almost the exact same day that Napoleon had launched his own.

Coupled with this seeking out of defeat, according to Waite, was a preoccupation with suicide. At frequent times in his life, Hitler appears to have been suicidal, or at least to have threatened it if his plans did not work out. Finally, of course, he took this drastic action after securing failure on a scale even he could be impressed by.

If Waite's interpretation can be accepted, then where did this guilt come from? The assertion made was that it was Hitler's fear that he was actually of Jewish descent. There were rumours (largely disproved, but Hitler may have still been worried about their possible truth) that his grandfather had been Jewish.

Waite's ultimate conclusion was highly disturbing. He suggested that Hitler's violent anti-Semitism might have stemmed directly from this fear of his own perceived Jewish heritage. In seeking to make it clear that he was not a Jew, he was driven to the depths of inhumanity.


THE MIND OF ADOLF HITLER
THE SECRET WARTIME REPORT
BY WALTER C. LANGER
WHY THE EVIL GENIUS ACTED THE WAY HE DID. "A MASTERPIECE."

Waite did agree with the OSS report in one area, however - that Hitler was perverse and self-destructive, sexually. In Langer's original work, he went to great lengths to explain his deductions on this subject. Yet the problem facing researchers was a total lack of evidence to support such a claim. All of the acquaintances interviewed, or whose testimony could be consulted, insisted there was either nothing unusual about Hitler's sexuality, or that he was simply not interested in sex at all.

The lack of information led Langer to make an extraordinary assertion - that the actions of patients with "behaviour patterns, tendencies and sentiments" similar to Hitler's could be studied as proxies in order to learn about him. The belief among those working on the report was that Hitler was "a neurotic psychopath bordering on schizophrenia". By looking at other patients who fell into this categorisation, they asserted, broad claims could be made about Hitler himself.

This led to the least convincing section of the report, in which one supposition was piled on top of another to get to a conclusion of Hitler's perversity that had no backing in terms of evidence. Despite this, it was later quoted as fact by Waite.

More persuasive, but still highly speculative, was Langer's attempt to get to the heart of Hitler's psyche - his ability to make the most appallingly brutal decisions. A troubled childhood was an obvious element to look for, but Hitler was tight-lipped about his past and gave only banal snippets of detail in *Mein Kampf*. Langer chose to interpret a passage in this book as autobiographical, and deduced that Hitler had experienced a violent childhood at the hands of an abusive father. This has since been discredited, but supplied a plausible background for a boy who would grow up to become a genocidal leader.

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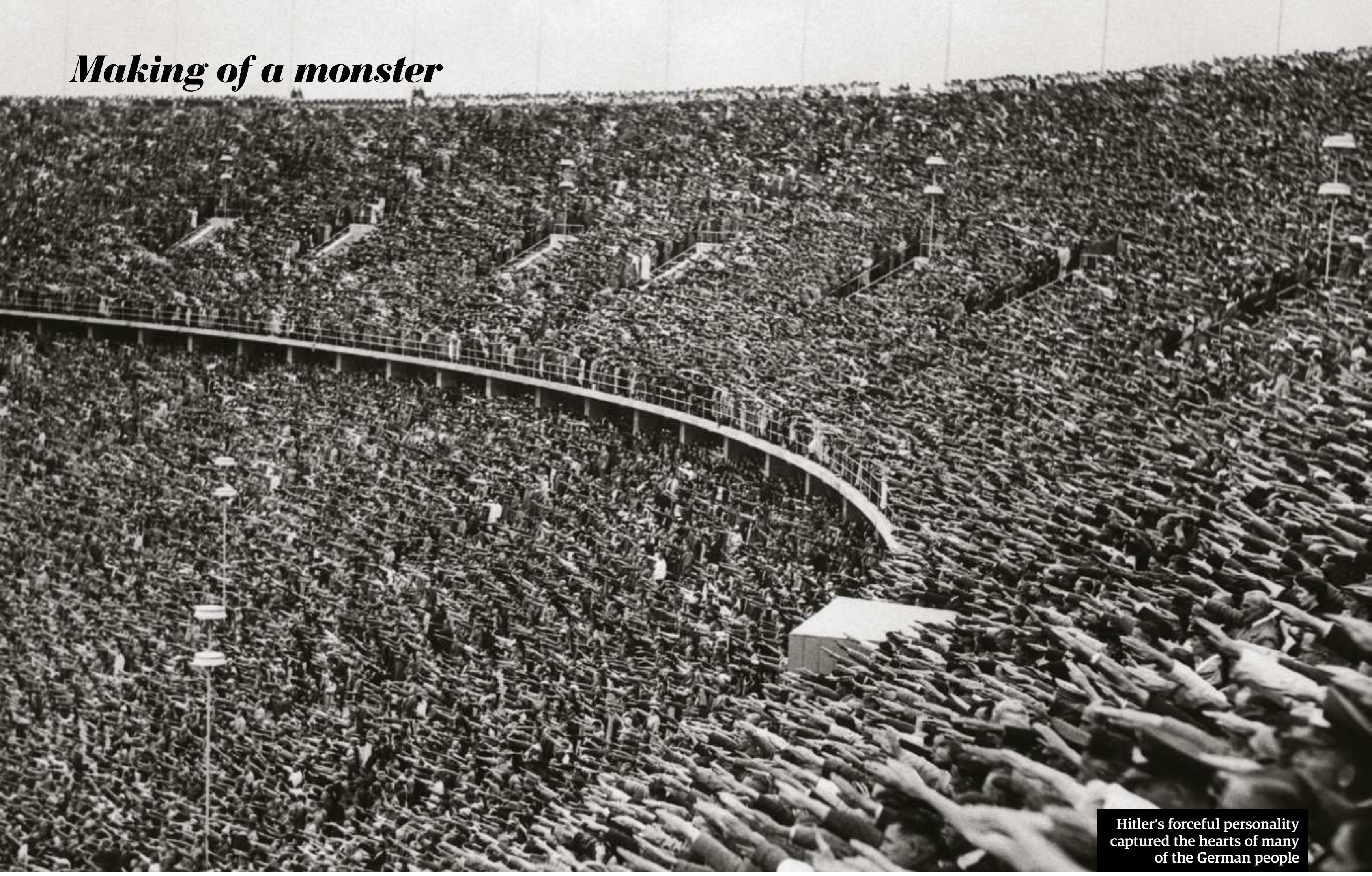


Hitler's forceful personality captured the hearts of many of the German people

"Langer likened him to Jekyll and Hyde. As Hitler, he was sensitive and weak. As the Führer, he was bold and ethically blind"

Hitler was also characterised as having two personalities, which Langer explicitly likened to Jekyll and Hyde. As Hitler, he was sensitive, indecisive and weak. As the Führer, he was decisive, bold, hard-headed and completely blind to moral or ethical considerations. Associates of Hitler spoke of shockingly sudden mood swings, including violent temper tantrums that could appear out of nowhere. Langer asserted that Hitler could switch between characters at will, depending on which would suit his purpose. The theory fits with descriptions of Hitler's speech-making, which repeatedly featured hesitant, stumbling openings before he got into his stride and started to unleash his powerful, hypnotic and hate-filled rhetoric.

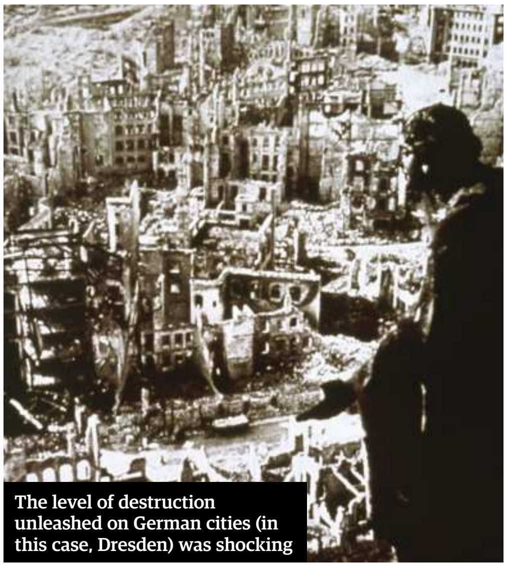
Hermann Rauschning, a former Nazi Party member who fled to America in 1936 and became a critic of the Nazis, was quoted as saying: "He is languid and apathetic by nature and needs the stimulus of nervous excitement to rouse him out of chronic lethargy to a spasmodic activity."

The Führer character was, therefore, a fake, a fabrication. It was an "exaggerated and distorted conception of masculinity as Hitler sees it", in Langer's words. The fact that the German people believed in the fabrication made it easier for Hitler to be convinced by his own deception.

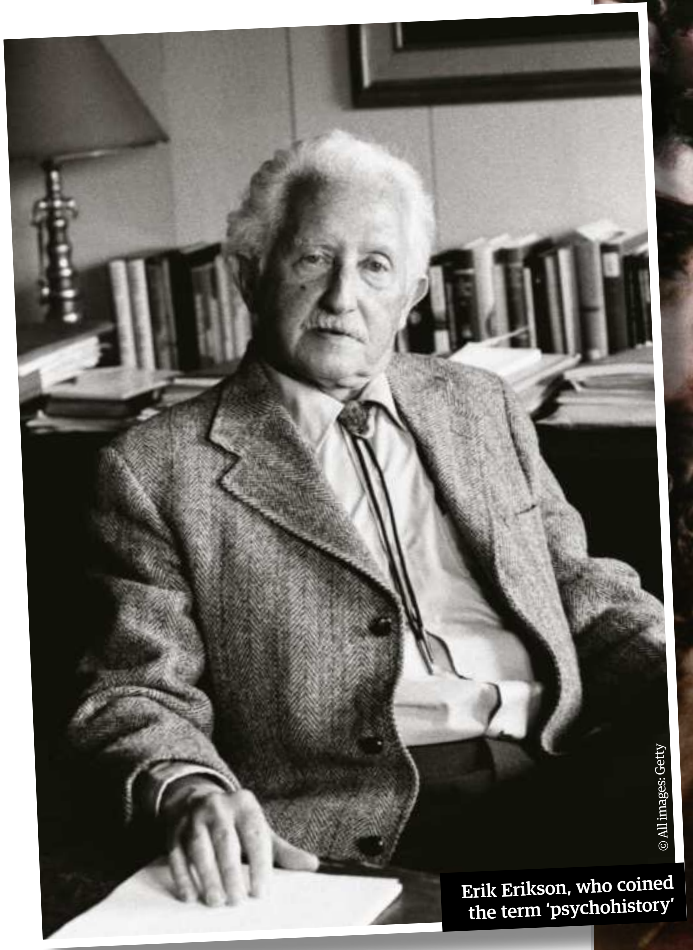
Simply writing this off as insanity, Langer argued, would achieve nothing (in any event, his colleagues all agreed that Hitler was not insane in the conventionally understood meaning of the word). Considering him to just be evil, or the devil incarnate, was too simplistic and would not help those who had to deal with him. At the same time, simply removing Hitler from power would achieve nothing, because "the madness of the Führer has become the madness of a nation".

The report also dismissed the notion that Hitler was in some way obsessed with astrology, claiming there was no evidence to support this (although a similar lack of evidence had not silenced the report's dubious theories regarding Hitler's sexuality). There were, however, intriguing instances when Hitler drew on passages in the Bible. Whether this was deliberate or not was unclear – Hitler was explicit in his wishes not to be treated as a god, but he did not object when people did so anyway. His words were often strikingly similar, if not exactly the same, as Biblical texts. This was especially apparent when he was addressing young people, such as members of the Hitler Youth movement, and they clearly suggest a depth of knowledge about the Bible.

In seeking to shed light on how to deal with him, the report made an interesting assertion. Hitler, according to Langer, understood Churchill and Stalin, and therefore was not afraid of them. Roosevelt, on the other hand, was puzzling to him, and his decisions unpredictable. Consequently, Hitler respected and feared the American president, but felt he could easily handle Churchill and Stalin.



The level of destruction unleashed on German cities (in this case, Dresden) was shocking



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Erik Erikson, who coined the term 'psychohistory'

Despite the power of his persona, Hitler was plagued by personal doubts

Worryingly, there appeared to be no end in sight to Hitler's destructive rule. In fact, it was destined to get worse. Plagued by irrational fears about his health and paranoia about plots against him (which would be borne out), Hitler's world was becoming increasingly small, Langer concluded. He would compensate with bigger and bigger plans and projects, but they would bring him no comfort, so he would be driven to attempt even more. Where this would end was plain to see by the time the report was written. Germany was heading for defeat, but how Hitler himself would meet that defeat was of vital importance.

The final section of the report briefly outlined the possibilities surrounding Hitler's downfall. He might go insane or be assassinated. He might choose to personally lead his armies in a final hopeless offensive (which could make him a heroic martyr). Most likely, however, was the final option considered. The Führer might commit suicide.

Having shown great perception in judging this the most likely outcome, however, Langer went on to get the rest of his prediction badly wrong. "In all probability," he wrote, "it would not be a simple suicide. He has much too much of the dramatic for that." A flamboyant suicide would "establish the Hitler legend so firmly in the minds of the German people that it might take generations to eradicate it".

Hitler's eventual suicide was a grubby and undramatic act, a mixture of poison and pistol in an underground bunker. There would be no heroic ending. Although Hitler's legacy remains with us, there is no feeling of reverence in the hearts of the people that he led to such utter destruction.

DID HITLER THINK HE WAS JEWISH?

A suspicion about his background may have been at the heart of Hitler's brutal treatment of the Jews

Intriguing evidence suggests Hitler may have believed he had Jewish ancestry. He had endured ribbing as a youth (while in Vienna, an acquaintance would joke that he looked Jewish), but there were more concrete fears as well.

His father's mother was a servant, and the rumour developed that her master was Jewish. When she became pregnant, it was further whispered that her master was the father, which would mean that Hitler's father was half-Jewish.

There was no evidence to support the gossip, but the possibility appears to have gnawed at Hitler. He sent his lawyer, Hans Frank, to look into the story when it first surfaced in 1930 and no evidence was found.

Hitler, however, became preoccupied with the notion of German servants being impregnated by Jewish masters. In the Nuremberg Racial Laws of 1935, he dictated the order that Jewish households were not allowed to employ German female servants younger than 45. He also called for the destruction of his father's birthplace, to make way for an artillery range (when other equally suitable sites were more easily available), as if wanting to destroy evidence.

The theory also chimes with Hitler's obsession with the purity of blood. He used leeches, was vegetarian partly because he thought it would be purifying, and allowed his doctor to draw blood, which he would then stare at in morbid fascination.

Whether or not he actually believed he was part-Jewish, he does seem to have been convinced that it was at least a possibility.

Hitler was haunted by a suspicion that his father was half-Jewish

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RISE TO POWER

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The Nazis' first bid for power was clumsy, poorly planned and almost cost Hitler his life

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After being imprisoned, Hitler wrote one of the most controversial books of all time

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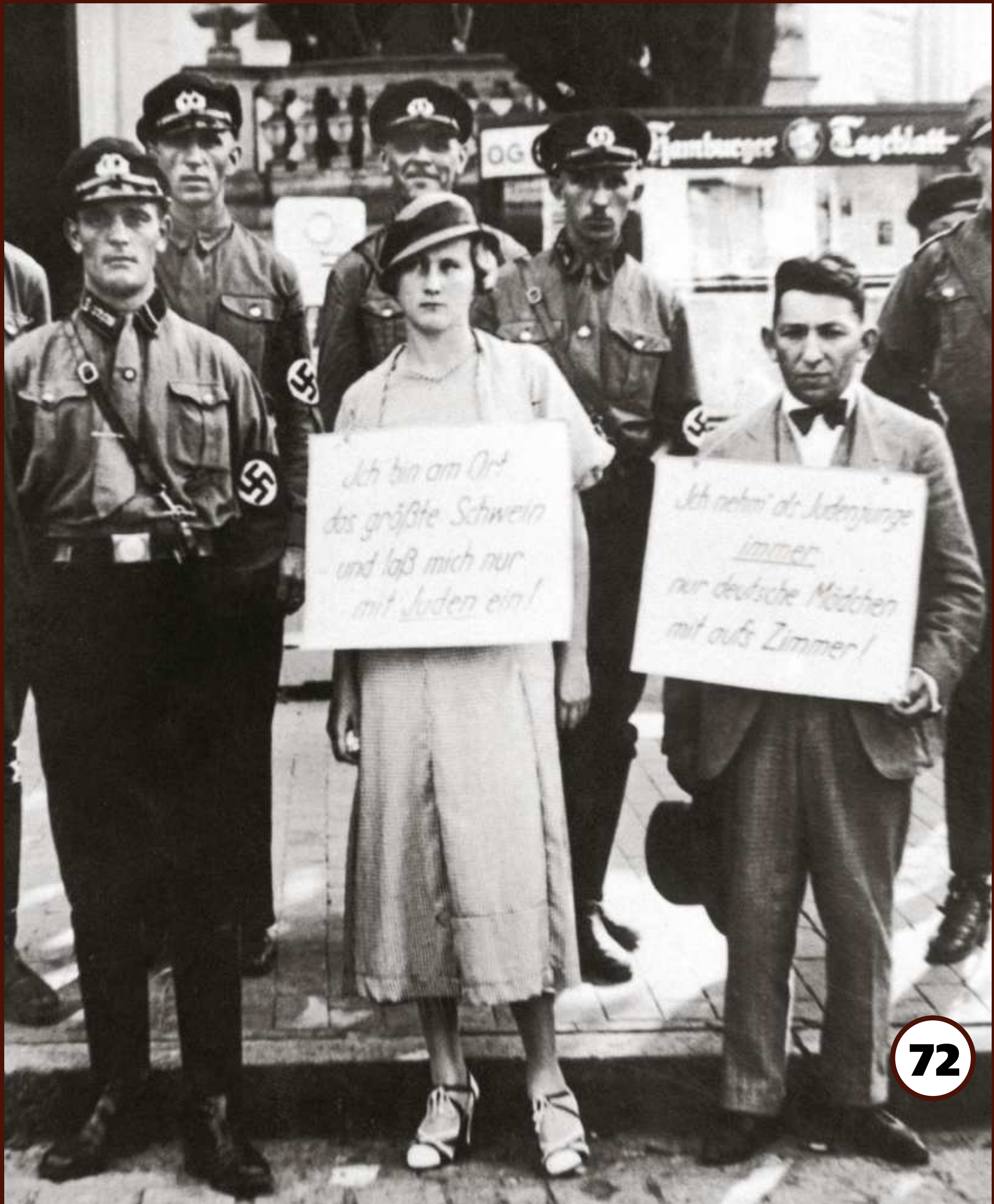

Hamburger Tageblatt
Ich bin am Ort
das größte Schwein
und laß mich nur
mit Juden ein!
Ich nehm' als Judenjunge
immer
nur deutsche Mädchen
mit aufs Zimmer!

72

Stormtroopers of the Sturmabteilung in Munich on the day of the Beer Hall Putsch

THE BEER HALL PUTSCH

The Nazis' first bid for power was clumsy, poorly planned and almost cost Hitler his life

Written by David Foley

The early 1920s was a turbulent time in Germany, and the nation's political parties were no exception. Brutality was the order of the day, and as the Nazi Party's notoriety grew, it became increasingly willing to use violence as a tool.

Carefully selected events kept the party in the public eye, such as a march on German National Day in Coburg, in October 1922. Aggression and confrontation were always welcome - in fact they were sought out as a means of raising awareness of the party. The time was coming, however, when violence would need to serve a higher purpose. In a tense atmosphere caused by hundreds of political assassinations after the end of the war, someone would soon need to make a move - it was just a question of who would strike first.

The moderate centre of German politics was being increasingly drowned out by the extremism of the left and right wings. It was expected that one or the other would attempt to seize power soon, and the Nazis were aware that if they left it too late to make their bid for control of the country, the communists might beat them to the punch. The communists, of course, had already failed in earlier, smaller scale bids for power, but the Nazis still viewed them as a threat.

The success of the revolution in Russia just a few years previous was in many ways an inspiration - it proved that the political system could be overturned by direct and aggressive action. However, it was also a warning of how the Bolsheviks could grab hold of a country with decisive action. Equally beguiled by the success of the communists and afraid that they might repeat that success in Germany, the Nazis were pushed towards premature action. The outcome was nearly fatal for them.

In Italy, the rise of Benito Mussolini provided a more hopeful model for the Nazis. Hitler spoke in glowing terms of the "great man beyond the Alps", but the time was not yet right. The Nazi Party was still small, although it was growing, and as it dithered over whether to act, outside events took centre stage when the German economy collapsed.

France declared that Germany was not paying its war debts and occupied the Ruhr as a response. There was uproar in Germany, and Hitler

© Photo by Three Lions/Getty Images

deliberately targeted his strongest criticism not at the French, but at the German politicians who had allowed the terms of the Treaty of Versailles to be imposed upon the nation.

With the Ruhr cut off from the rest of the country, the economy was plunged into meltdown. Hyperinflation destroyed the value of German currency and the country slipped into turmoil as unemployment soared. By November 1923, the mark was trading against the US dollar at the scarcely credible ratio of 4.2 trillion to one. In this atmosphere it was ever more likely that one of the extremist parties would try to capitalise, and the Nazis finally decided that they couldn't afford to wait any longer.

The first steps were taken with the formation of the German Combat League, a collaboration of right-wing extremists including the Sturmabteilung and the White Russian-led Aufbau Vereinigung (Organisation for Reconstruction) movement, among others. Initially led by Ernst Röhm, it was ready to act when the time came.

© Photo by General Photographic Agency/Getty Images

French soldiers in Düsseldorf during the French occupation of the Ruhr

> "As he started the march towards Odeonsplatz, the largest square in Munich, he was supported by about 2,000 members of the Combat League"

That time was drawing near, as Hitler spoke openly about an uprising. The authorities were aware that some sort of coup was likely to erupt and made efforts to keep a closer watch on the activities of the Nazi Party, ordering Gustav Ritter von Kahr to attend meetings and report back on the mood of the organisation.

Planning a putsch

Kahr, the former prime minister of Bavaria, was an extremist himself, and he actually supported the idea of a coup led by the army - General Hans von Seeckt was heading up a group of disgruntled officers who were considering a move. However, Kahr was no supporter of the Nazis, although he favoured the right over the communists. He had met and been unimpressed by Hitler, and he saw the Nazis as potentially getting in the way of his favoured military coup. He therefore had complex motivations, but could be relied upon to report back if he learned anything of interest.

But however dedicated Kahr was to his job, he missed the most important piece of information that was floating around at the time: a date had been set for an uprising. The anniversary of the 1918 revolution, 9 November, was selected and planning was in full swing. Hitler now had some familiar names in his entourage - Rudolf Hess and Hermann Göring had joined Röhm at the heart of the party - and together they planned for the uprising that would become known as the Beer Hall Putsch.

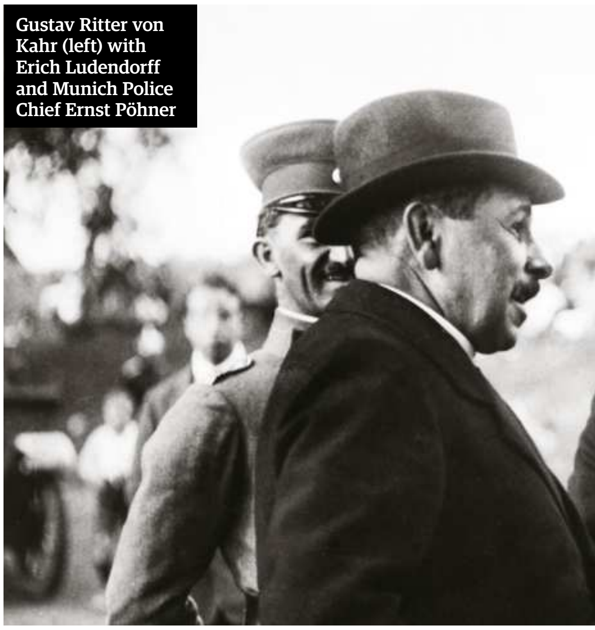
The planning process left much to be desired. Based mainly on an optimistic assessment of how the country would react to an uprising, the Nazis failed to adequately assess the most important element - whether or not they could count on the support of the army. Without the backing of the military, or at least a significant part of it, they had little to no chance of sparking a revolution.

Perhaps the presence of the old general Erich Ludendorff, a member of the conspiracy, convinced the Nazis that army support would follow, but it was a dangerous gamble to take. It was not as if there had been no warning of the danger of failing to secure large-scale military support. A 1920 putsch led by General Walther von Lüttwitz and Wolfgang Kapp had failed despite having the backing of a Freikorps brigade. Hitler's party could not even call on that level of support.

The evening before the planned putsch, Hitler gate-crashed a meeting at the Bürgerbräukeller beer hall in Munich armed and surrounded by SA heavies. Speaking at the meeting was none other than Kahr, whom Hitler was keen to bring over to support his uprising. The year before, Mussolini had marched on Rome and Hitler had visions of doing something similar by marching on Berlin, and things appeared to be going smoothly when Kahr agreed to back him. However, no sooner had Kahr been allowed to leave the beer hall than he went back on his word and alerted the army and police to Hitler's intentions.

There had been great excitement in the hall, but Hitler's assertion that he had army backing was not based on fact. The next day, as he started the march towards Odeonsplatz, the largest square

Gustav Ritter von Kahr (left) with Erich Ludendorff and Munich Police Chief Ernst Pöhner



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GÖRING'S ITALIAN ADVENTURE

Having evaded capture after the Beer Hall Putsch, Hermann Göring fled first to Austria and then to Italy

Not all of the leading figures in the Beer Hall Putsch were arrested – Hermann Göring evaded capture but still paid a high price for his involvement. Having been seriously wounded in the leg, he escaped to Austria with his wife, Carin. At Innsbruck he was operated on and was in such severe pain that he was given morphine in large quantities.

The leg wound proved reluctant to heal and Göring walked with a limp, even gaining weight due to the lack of activity. By spring 1924 he was no longer welcome in Austria thanks to his political activity, attempting to raise support for the Nazi Party. Italy seemed the natural next step, as the party had established strong links with Mussolini and he was likely to receive a warm welcome.

Göring cut a dashing figure as a fighter pilot in World War I

This does not appear to have gone as far as an actual meeting with the Italian dictator, but there was some correspondence. Göring wrote to Il Duce to request support for the Nazis, promising that a Nazi government would be a friend to the Italians and even guaranteeing that Italy would still receive the reparations granted by the Treaty of Versailles should Hitler come to power soon.

Göring's Italian visit in many ways shaped him, and he became the main link between the Nazis and the fascist Italians. He had also become the rotund figure familiar from newsreel footage, having lost his athletic physique as a result of his wound and lack of exercise. His treatment had moulded him in one other way – he was now a morphine addict.

in Munich, he was supported by about 2,000 members of the Combat League, but he did not have large-scale army backing.

The putsch encountered resistance as it approached the square, where armed police had gathered to stop it in its tracks. There was a brief exchange of fire in which 16 marchers died along with four policemen, and the putsch had fallen at the first hurdle. Hitler himself had a narrow escape – marching with his arm linked with Max von Scheubner-Richter, a nationalist who had helped forge links between the Nazis and the White Russians, he was dragged to the ground when von Scheubner-Richter was shot and mortally wounded. Hermann Göring was not as lucky as Hitler, being shot in the leg.

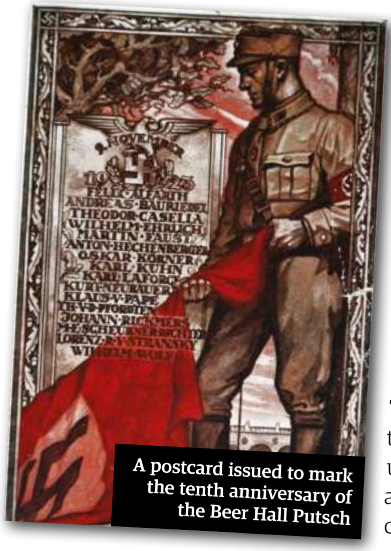
The Beer Hall Putsch was by any measure an embarrassment, having failed even more spectacularly than Kapp's effort of the previous year. Yet it served a valuable purpose in highlighting Hitler's willingness to take strong action, and it boosted the visibility of the Nazi Party still further.

Crime and punishment

Having gone into hiding for two days, Hitler was found, arrested and placed on trial along with other key conspirators including Ludendorff. When the case was heard on 26 February 1924, the old general was acquitted but it was impossible for Hitler to escape the simple fact that he was obviously guilty of the charges against him. Nevertheless, the trial gave him a pulpit from which to preach, and a lenient Bavarian court allowed him to rant to his heart's content.

The court also handed him the most lenient sentence possible – five years' imprisonment with an understanding that he would actually serve only a matter of months. Some reports claim Hitler was close to suicide at this point, but he would use his time in prison to pen the first volume of his lengthy diatribe against the system, *Mein Kampf*, and he would manage to rebound from his failure. The putsch had taught him that violence could not be relied upon in his quest for power, and he would subsequently change tack, rebuilding his party image to enable it to take control through the democratic processes he had previously disdained.

The Nazi Party was made illegal following the uprising and Hitler wasn't allowed to speak in public until 1927, but he easily circumvented that restriction and his book also allowed him to get his message out during the following years. A decade after his imprisonment, Hitler would get his revenge on Kahr, having him murdered during the Night of the Long Knives.



A postcard issued to mark the tenth anniversary of the Beer Hall Putsch

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Hitler speaks at the Bürgerbräukeller during a 1938 commemoration of the failed 1923 coup

© Photograph by Hugo Jaeger/The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images

THE NAZI BIBLE

After being imprisoned, Hitler wrote one of the most controversial books of all time

Written by David Foley

Few publications have gained the notoriety of Adolf Hitler's 'Nazi Bible', *Mein Kampf*. Spread over two volumes, it outlines his philosophies as well as presenting a highly airbrushed version of his life up to the point of his incarceration following the failed Beer Hall Putsch in 1923.

The book is universally criticised for its lack of readability, being little more than a prolonged rant, full of repetition. It is also difficult to read for other reasons, as it lays out fully Hitler's violent anti-Semitism and his plans for dealing with both the Jewish and Bolshevik 'threats' to Germany. Yet it cannot be simply dismissed as a poor work from a poorly educated, second-rate writer. Winston Churchill got to the heart of the matter when he declared, "Here was the new Koran of faith and war: turgid, verbose, shapeless, but pregnant with its message." *Mein Kampf* may have been badly written, but what it said could not be ignored.

The leniency of Hitler's sentence following conviction was matched by the leniency of his treatment while in prison. Sentenced to five years, he served just 13 months, and these were spent in comfortable surroundings. He enjoyed a private cell, with books and writing materials at his disposal. He was also allowed to fraternise with fellow inmates, including his fellow Nazi conspirators, at will.

By the time of his release in December 1924, Hitler had written the first volume of his book. Many legends have grown up around the creation of *Mein Kampf* ('My Struggle'). For decades it was believed that Rudolf Hess had typed up the manuscript while Hitler dictated, but this theory is now being questioned. More rumours insisted that the book was co-authored, with Hess and a priest, Bernhard Stempfle, among the suspected contributors. Stempfle was still being credited with significantly rewriting the book in the 1960s, but more recent research has cast doubt on this as well. It is now believed that the book is almost entirely the work of Hitler himself.

The exact nature and purpose of *Mein Kampf* is also debated. It was initially considered a clear statement of Hitler's intent, designed to convince the German people to follow the path he had charted for them. The lack of focus and discipline

One of the most controversial books ever written, *Mein Kampf* has sold millions of copies around the world

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Adolf Hitler
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Mein Kampf
Eher-Verlag

in the writing was noted from the start, but it was nevertheless believed to form a sort of blueprint for a Nazi Germany. If that was the original intention, Hitler certainly strayed from that blueprint when he came to power.

An example of this is his assertion in the book that merely trying to regain the status of Germany prior to World War I, including a recovery of its old borders, would be a pointless and costly exercise. Once in power, he actually expended significant energy on recovering the pre-Versailles borders. His posture towards the British also changed. Having viewed them in the book as an essential ally in controlling the threat from France, he instead became antagonistic towards the United Kingdom, with the result that he never had the peaceful situation on his western borders that he had declared to be essential for his planned expansion to the east.

Despite these inconsistencies, Hitler himself had harboured no doubts about what he was producing. "After years of uninterrupted labour it was now possible for the first time to begin a work which many had asked for and I myself felt would be profitable for the Movement," he noted. "So I decided to devote two volumes to a description not only of the aims of our Movement but also of its development. There is more to be learned from this than from any purely doctrinaire treatise."

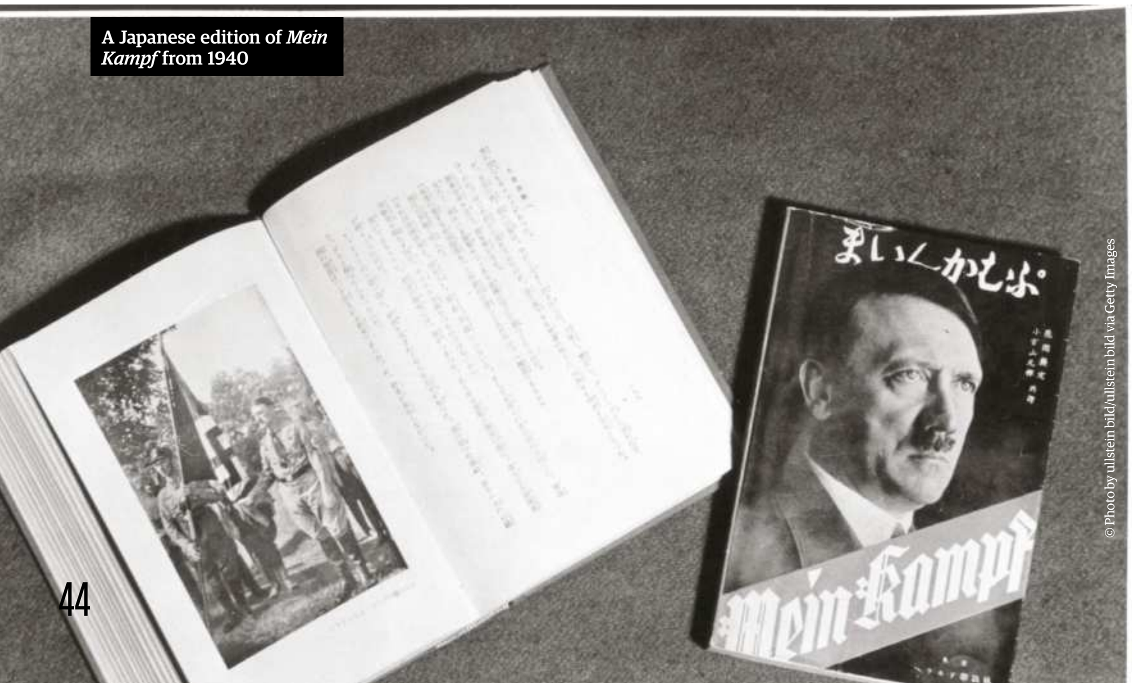
Hitler claimed that the written word was less powerful than the spoken, no doubt missing his opportunities to deliver tub-thumping speeches to rapturous audiences, but he seemed to view the book as a sort of permanent record. It would be less powerful than a rousing speech, but it could be turned to at any time by anyone with an interest in the Nazi credo. *Mein Kampf* would present Hitler's

ADOLF HITLER
MEIN KAMPF

© Photo by David E. Scherman/The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images

An American soldier reads *Mein Kampf* on a bed once owned by Hitler

"Mein Kampf would present Hitler's Weltanschauung, his outlook on the world, and it was an outlook full of dark clouds"



A Japanese edition of *Mein Kampf* from 1940

© Photo by ullstein bild/ullstein bild via Getty Images

A pirate copy of *Mein Kampf* being sold on an Indian street

Mein Kampf
Adolf Hitler

© Photo by Pradeep Gaur/Mint via Getty Images

MEIN KAMPF IN INDIA

Hitler's work enjoys some of its strongest global sales in India, for a variety of reasons

The popularity of Hitler's book in India is a troubling issue, raising all sorts of questions about what it is that appeals to Indian readers.

Mein Kampf was first published in India in 1928, and its success saw other editions from many other publishers following soon after. Between 2003 and 2010, over one million English-language copies of the book were sold in India, and it has since also been released in Gujarati, Hindi, Malayalam, Bengali and Tamil, all of which have also sold well.

In the world of pirated editions, which make up a significant part of the Indian market, *Mein Kampf* is reckoned to be more popular than the novels of Dan Brown, and this is before looking at free downloads.

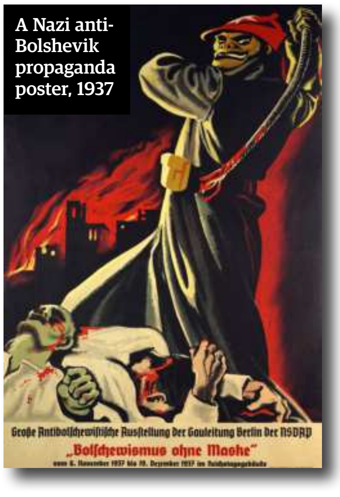
There have been many theories on why the book has proved so popular in India, but some see it as an influence on right-wing politicians. There also seems to be some sympathy among anti-imperialists, with the basic idea that any enemy of Britain was a friend of India.

Finally, the book is used as a 'strategy management text' in some business schools in the country. Divorced from the ideas of national socialism, Hitler is believed by some to have demonstrated powerful leadership qualities.

In 2018, an Indian publisher released a book on the world's greatest leaders and put a photograph of Hitler on the front cover and in the same year the *Times of India* ran an article titled 'Why Hitler is not a dirty word in India'.

Weltanschauung, his outlook on the world, and it was an outlook full of dark clouds.

Those who read the book before Hitler came to power were mostly unimpressed. Later, there were efforts to explain why such a clear warning had been ignored. The Conservative politician Sir Samuel Hoare commented, "We could not believe that the rantings of *Mein Kampf* were a practical manual of daily conduct from which he [Hitler] would never deviate." While Hoare overstated the degree to which Hitler stuck to the principles outlined in his book, his meaning was clear - how could anyone have thought *Mein Kampf* was serious?


Große Antibolſchewiſtiſche Ausſtellung der Gauleitung Berlin der NSDAP
„Bolſchewismus ohne Maske"

A Nazi anti-Bolshevik propaganda poster, 1937

A new nation

Others were more disturbed by what they read. The British novelist George Orwell got hold of a copy in 1940, and although his impression of it was inevitably coloured by the events since Hitler had come to power, he saw menace in the clumsy words. He was also puzzled as to how Hitler had dragged the German people along with him, having promised them so little in the pages of *Mein Kampf*. He commented that "whereas socialism, and even capitalism in a more grudging way, have said to people 'I offer you a good time,' Hitler has said to them, 'I offer you struggle, danger, and death,' and as a result a whole nation flings itself at his feet".

Hitler's words were ominous to anyone who took them seriously. "The National Socialist doctrine is not handmaid to the political interests of the single federal states," he warned. "One day it must become teacher to the whole German nation. It must determine the life of the whole people and shape that life anew."

The central theme of *Mein Kampf* was returning Germany to the position of a global power. The vicious anti-Semitism of the book is well known, but less so is the fact that Hitler envisaged getting assistance from both Britain and Italy in his plan. German expansion would be achieved by pushing to the East, into territories either owned or controlled by the Soviet Union. In order to facilitate this, France would need to be neutralised, which would be done with Britain's assistance.

Many historians have perused the pages of *Mein Kampf* in an attempt to discern if Hitler had plans for global domination, or if he had smaller-scale (although still monstrous) ideas. Hitler spoke of the people - the Volk - rather than the land itself. Territorial expansion (the famous Lebensraum, or 'living space') was essential, but not for its own sake - it was necessary to allow Germans to support themselves. Hitler saw no point in an alliance with Russia, as Germany would have to supply its backwards ally. There was also the fact that he believed Russia had been taken over by a Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy that was working to destroy the Fatherland.

This was at the heart of some of the most disturbing pages of the book, in which he considered the question of nationalism. He wrote in disdainful terms of how anyone could become a German citizen either through an application or simply by being born within state borders: "…And a Mongolian slave is forthwith turned into a real German." Such additions to the citizenry were, in Hitler's eyes, "poisonous matter", which became ominous indeed when he added, "The nationalisation of our masses will succeed only when … their international poisoners are exterminated."

It is not believed that Hitler formulated his plans to completely eliminate the Jewish presence in Germany before he came to power, but their genesis is clearly seen in the pages of *Mein Kampf*. And the savagery of his words was often shocking, no more so than when he stated that if a few

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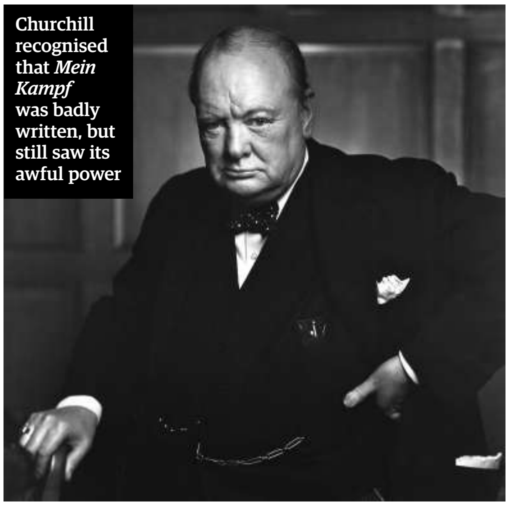
Copies of *Mein Kampf* were given away free with copies of the newspaper *Il Giornale* in Italy in June 2016

thousand Jews had been gassed on the front lines during the early days of World War I, then the sacrifice of millions of Germans would not have been in vain.

The two volumes of the book are titled 'A Reckoning' (sometimes translated as 'A Retrospect') and 'The National Socialist Movement'. The first volume is largely devoted to Hitler's story of his own youth and development, but it is important to note that this is highly suspect, as he was free with fabrications, exaggerations and suppressions in an attempt to portray himself as the perfect leader of the German people.



Churchill recognised that *Mein Kampf* was badly written, but still saw its awful power

A lesson in propaganda

Inconvenient truths were airbrushed out of this history, while a more palatable narrative was dropped in. Hitler claimed to have started to develop his hatred of the Jews at a much younger age than the evidence would support, for instance, and he also skirted around the details of his military service in World War I.

The writing is repetitive and dull, but some have commented that it is more powerful in the original German, and the German people were, after all, the primary target audience.

In the second volume, which was written after his release from prison, Hitler laid out the policies and tactics the Nazi Party would need to employ to bring Germany back to its rightful position in the world. He started with an astute assessment of the strategies used by the existing parties, which were always focused on the next election. "The moment these artists in parliamentary government have the first glimmering of a suspicion that their darling public may be ready to kick up its heels and escape from the harness of the old party wagon," he wrote, "they begin to paint the shafts with new colours."

In an uncomfortable parallel with the modern political arena, Hitler then poured scorn on the 'experts', who would offer new initiatives to woo the voters back, only to drop them as soon as re-election had been achieved. His warning to the perpetrators of this endless cycle was stark: "We are trying to make up for that which you, in your criminal stupidity, have failed to carry out. By your parliamentarian jobbing you have helped to drag the nation into ruin. But we, by our aggressive policy, are setting up a new Weltanschauung, which we shall defend with indomitable devotion."

Part of the strategy of defending their world view would be the widespread use of propaganda - Hitler believed that failures in the propaganda war had cost the nation dearly during World War I and he was determined not to make that mistake. In many ways, in fact, he saw it as more important than actual policies, and this was certainly borne out in the Nazi approach to subsequent elections. "Propaganda should go well ahead of organisation," he claimed, "and gather together the human material for the latter to work up."

Getting the people on your side was to be the first task - giving them something to do could come later. He also distinguished between 'followers' and 'members', the former merely believing in a particular system, while the latter were willing to fight for it. Hitler believed that followers would always outnumber members, because "the majority of mankind is mentally lazy and timid", but it was selecting the members from the masses of followers that was the crucial issue.

How many people were exposed to Hitler's writing, and how many subsequently became followers or members, is debated. The book did well, with the first print run of 10,000 selling out and another run going ahead in late 1925.

© Photo by Keystone/Getty Images

Hitler photographed around the time of the writing of the second volume of his book

HITLER'S ZWEITES BUCH

Before coming to power, Hitler made another attempt at committing his thoughts to paper

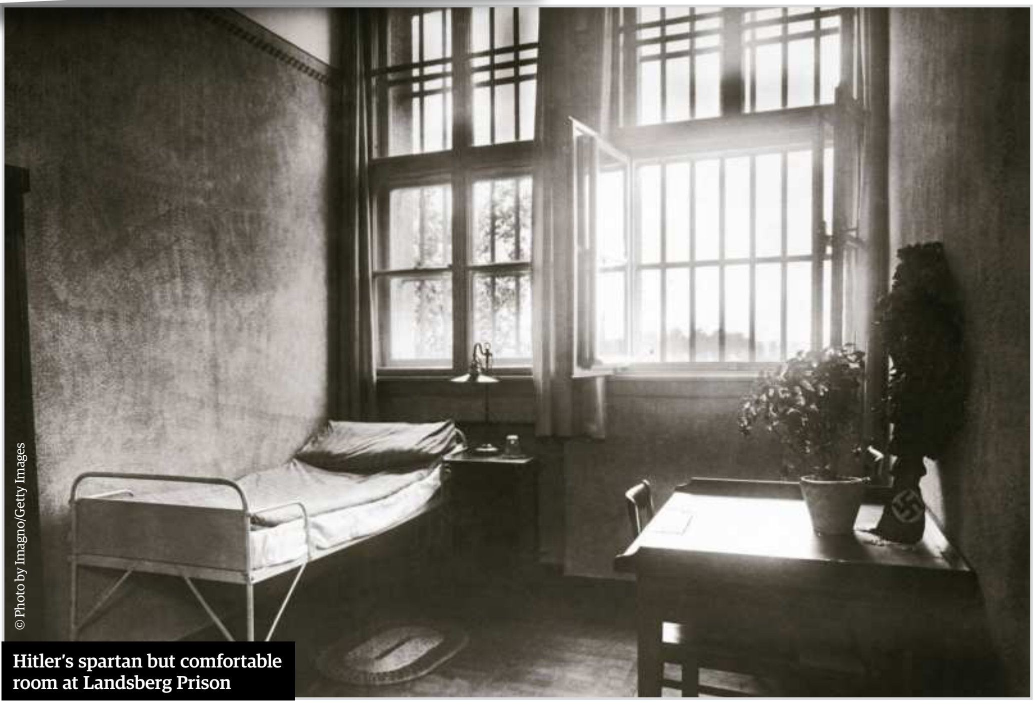
HITLERS
ZWEITES
BUCH
EIN DOKUMENT
AUS DEM JAHR
1928

In 1928, after struggling in that year's elections, Hitler decided that his message was not getting through. Accepting the fact that *Mein Kampf* was not an easy read, he worried that people were simply struggling to get through it. The solution? He would write another book, a sort of updating of his ideas as laid out in *Mein Kampf* but on a more manageable scale and in a more readable format.

The resulting manuscript ran to 200 pages but was never published. Known as *Hitlers Zweites Buch* ('Hitler's Second Book'), only two copies were made. Hitler's publisher, apparently concerned that issuing a new title would spoil the market for *Mein Kampf*, was unwilling to put the book into print, so it remained in manuscript form. Stored in an air raid shelter, it managed to survive the war and was discovered in 1945 and then again in 1958. It was finally published, unedited, in 1961.

Much of the themes of the book were the same as in *Mein Kampf*. Hitler called for a three-stage plan of action: alliances with Britain and Italy, a war with France and any of her allies who chose to stand with her, and finally the destruction of Bolshevik Russia.

The *Zweites Buch* did, however, raise one interesting new topic – the idea that the United States would one day emerge as Germany's most dangerous enemy. In fact, Hitler went further, suggesting the Americans would become the enemy of Europe as a whole.



© Photo by Imagno/Getty Images

Hitler's spartan but comfortable room at Landsberg Prison

However, it didn't achieve major popularity until Hitler was elected chancellor. From that point it became a runaway bestseller, but it has generally been accepted that most people who bought it did so to show loyalty to the governing regime rather than out of genuine interest or sympathy with the message it contained.

The future of the struggle

Still, there is evidence that *Mein Kampf* was widely read and debated, with both supportive and critical commentaries displaying a familiarity with the intricacies of the text. An order from the mid 1930s that all newlywed couples should be given a copy would certainly have boosted circulation, but in fact this was mostly ignored by local authorities who could not afford to buy copies on such a scale. Still, it is estimated that by 1939 more than five million copies had been sold, with that total doubling by the end of the war.

Publication in Germany was banned after World War II, and the Bavarian authorities – which held the rights due to Hitler having his official residence in Munich – also attempted to suppress publication in other countries. A new, heavily annotated version was published in Germany in 2016, intended to be used as an educational tool, although this did prove to be controversial.

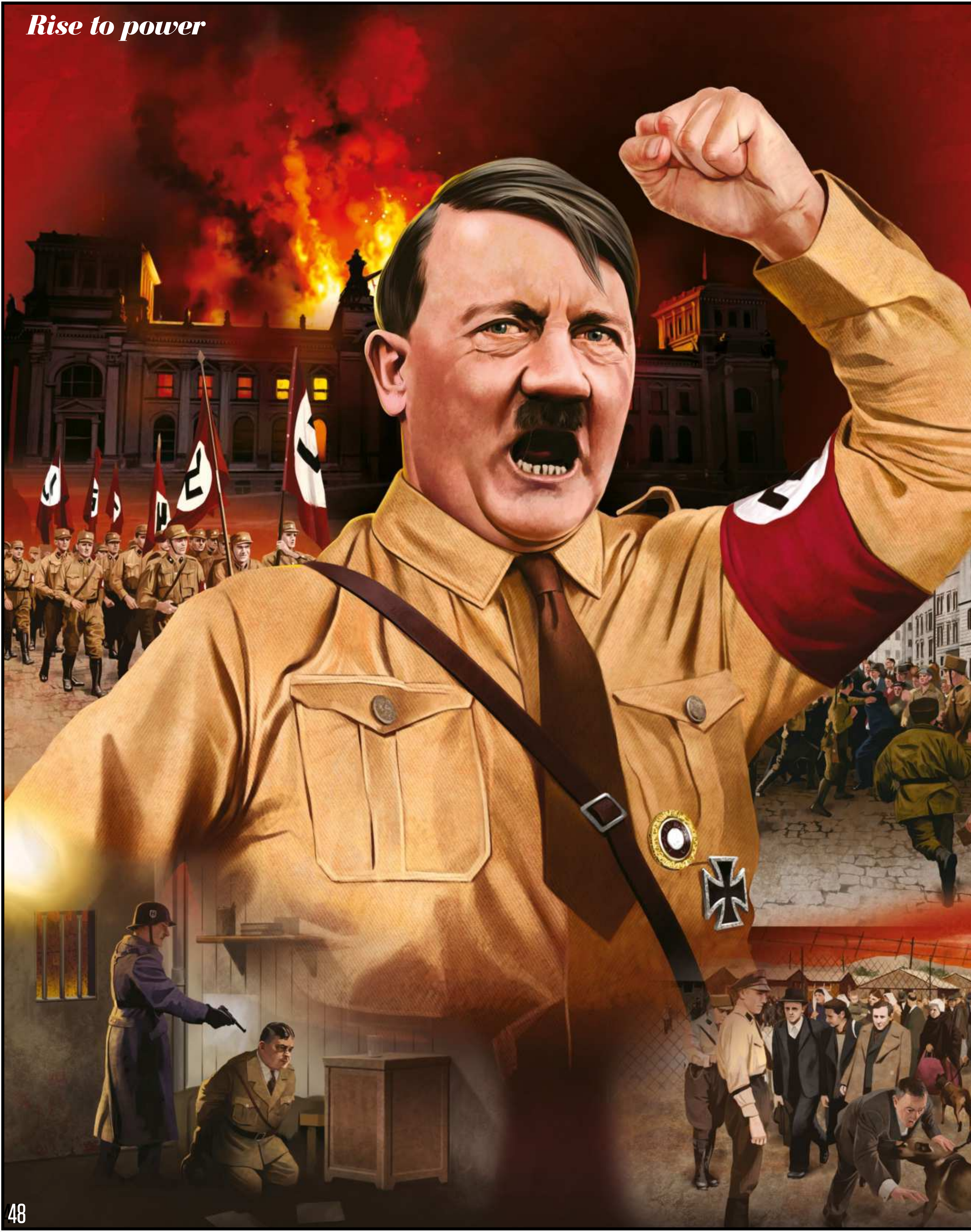
However, when the copyright expired 70 years after the death of the author, according to German law, more editions began to appear. It is now widely available, through both print and online, as the text is now within the public domain.

Having said that, the question of copyright was bypassed by the United States when the American government assumed ownership in 1942, which was authorised by the Trading with the Enemy Act of 1917. This then opened the way for the publisher Houghton Mifflin to release its own edition of *Mein Kampf* in 1979.

Other nations have been slower in deciding to publish the book in the vernacular. In the Netherlands, for instance, it was not republished until 2018, using the annotated 2016 German edition as a base and adding commentary from Dutch experts.

Mein Kampf remains one of the most controversial books ever written, but it would almost certainly have become little more than a footnote had Hitler himself not gone on to earn such infamy. Even works by other Nazis, such as those by Gottfried Feder and Alfred Rosenberg, have been largely forgotten.

The terrible power of the Hitler name gives *Mein Kampf* a sense of foreboding and horror. It might have been dismissed as the ravings of a lunatic had he not gone on to wrest power from the political system he despised. What *Mein Kampf* says is disturbing enough, but the real power of the book comes from the awful fact that, for the most part, Hitler was allowed to put his words into practice.



THE RISE OF EVIL

HITLER

How the demagogue used riots, racism & repression in his quest to restore German 'greatness'

Written by Emily Turner-Graham and Mike Haskew

To hear Hitler tell the story in his 1924 autobiography *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle), the course of his entire life - right from birth - had led to his dictatorship of Germany from 1933-45. The forces of destiny had carefully planned it all - he was a man marked by fate to lead the nation of Germany. But, in truth, history is rarely as neat as that, and Hitler's extraordinary rise to rule the totalitarian Nazi state in the 1930s and then lead the German people to war and almost total destruction is far more complex.

Instead it is a story that grew from the human tragedy of World War I and the social, economic and political chaos of its aftermath, a nation drawn to extremes in its pursuit of a new beginning, and the capacity of a broken man and his circle of followers to sell a myth of national rebirth to an intelligent, cultured but equally war-scarred nation. The years from 1924, when Hitler was released from a short stint in prison, up to 1934 and the infamous bloodletting of the Night of the Long Knives mark the key period in Hitler's rise to power.

When he emerged from Landsberg Prison in the south-western Bavarian town of Landsberg am Lech on 20 December 1924, he had served only nine months of a five-year sentence for treason for his role in the Beer Hall Putsch (revolt) on 8-9 November 1923. It was an attempt by the fledgling Nazi Party (which had only formed in 1919) and a handful of fellow right-wing travellers to overthrow the hated Weimar government.

Hitler's court trial, presided over by a pro-Nazi judge, had served only to provide him with a far-reaching public platform from which to broadcast his views, especially since the trial was being eagerly reported in the national newspapers. He not only admitted his guilt in the Putsch but in fact relished in it. "I have resolved to be the destroyer of Marxism," he proclaimed confidently from the dock, appointing himself the 'strong man' who many on the right believed Germany needed in order to emerge from the chaos and misery of its wartime years. Post-Putsch, he no longer saw himself as the 'drummer', preparing the path for the coming leader. Instead, he was the Führer (leader) himself.

Hitler, along with Rudolf Hess (who would become Deputy Führer in 1933), passed his prison sentence quite comfortably. He was able to receive guests, and a number of his political colleagues who would later become prominent figures in the Third Reich – such as Ernst Röhm, Wilhelm Frick and Alfred Rosenberg – paid numerous visits. This allowed for a like-minded group to develop, for Hitler to continue to expound and hone his views, and for him to consolidate his role as party leader – all while behind prison walls.

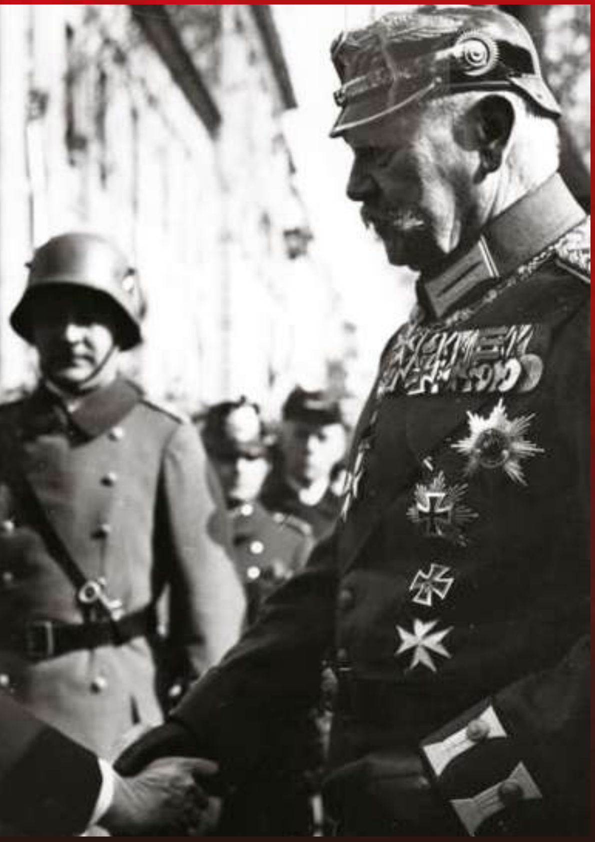
On top of this, Hitler also used the time to put together his political manifesto. In fact, he described prison as his "university paid for by the State." The book was called *Mein Kampf* and in it he detailed a set of ideas that, at their core, changed little over the course of his life and formed the essential nucleus of National Socialist (Nazi) ideology. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler also reshaped his own history in order to reinforce the idea that destiny had called him to lead Germany.

He and many of his followers began to believe that he was on a, "…near-messianic [mission]… to become the 'Great Leader' the nation awaited, who would expunge the 'criminal betrayal of 1918', restore Germany's might and power, and create a reborn 'Germanic State of the German nation'." His autobiography saw the beginning of 'the Führer Myth' that would last for some Germans until the bitter end of the Nazi period in 1945. One sympathetic writer said in 1924, "What lies dormant in the soul of the German people has taken shape in full living features… That has appeared in Adolf Hitler: the living incarnation of the nation's yearning."

Hitler sits beside his new appointed propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels, at a rally in Stuttgart, 1933

> "It seemed that Hitler had tapped into a number of common beliefs in Mein Kampf – he had just taken them to their extremes"

The opening of the new Reichstag symbolised unity between the Nazi Party and the old Prussian military elite



THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC: DOOMED TO FAILURE

When the kaiser fled, a new democratic government was declared in the small town of Weimar

The Weimar Republic refers to the German state from 1919 to 1933. Many Germans on the right believed the Republic had allowed Germany to lose World War I by conceding defeat too soon. Many nationalists also espoused the 'stab in the back' theory, believing that Bolsheviks and Jews had weakened the home front with damaging modern ideas such as feminism. The 1919 Treaty of Versailles, which the Weimar government accepted, took territory from Germany, called for colossal reparations and laid the blame for igniting the war squarely at the feet of the Central Powers – Germany, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria.

Added to this, in 1923 the French occupied the Ruhr in Germany, commandeering the district's rich raw materials. This was another mark against the Weimar government in the eyes of the right, along with the many black French colonial soldiers who were allowed as part of the Ruhr occupation force. During the same period, Germany suffered from devastating hyperinflation. A large number of Germans lost their social status and were reduced to poverty.

A solution came in the form of the Dawes Plan in 1924, but the German economy was left dependent on loans from the USA. This would have serious ramifications when the Great Depression struck in 1929.

Finally, there were inherent problems within Germany's system of government. Germany had only become a unified country in 1871 and since that time had been a monarchy. Germany was governed by coalitions with no overall majority. This resulted in a series of weak, unstable governments and a lack of public confidence in the political system.

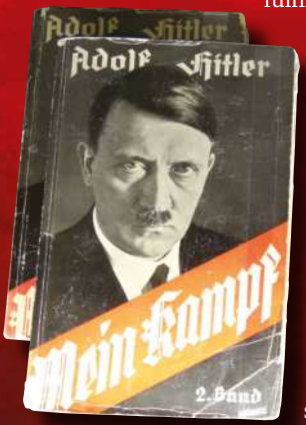
My struggle

Mein Kampf depicted a world characterised by constant struggle. All existence could be reduced to a battle between the strong and the weak. "Those that want to live, let them fight, and those who do not want to fight in this world of eternal struggle do not deserve to live." Hitler argued for Social Darwinism, an interpretation of Darwin's theory of evolution applied to humanity and best summed up as 'survival of the fittest'. The foremost means of defining the strong and the weak was through the lens of race. As Hitler said in *Mein Kampf*, "The racial question gives the key not only to world history but to all human culture." The Aryan was the greatest expression of humanity and the German ideal was characterised as being tall, well-built and healthy with blonde hair and blue eyes. The physical vitality of the Aryan was also expressed in their richly creative culture. For Hitler, Aryans were "the founders of culture". Their total opposite was the Jew. The Nazis depicted Jewry as a race not a religion that was unhealthy physically, mentally and spiritually.

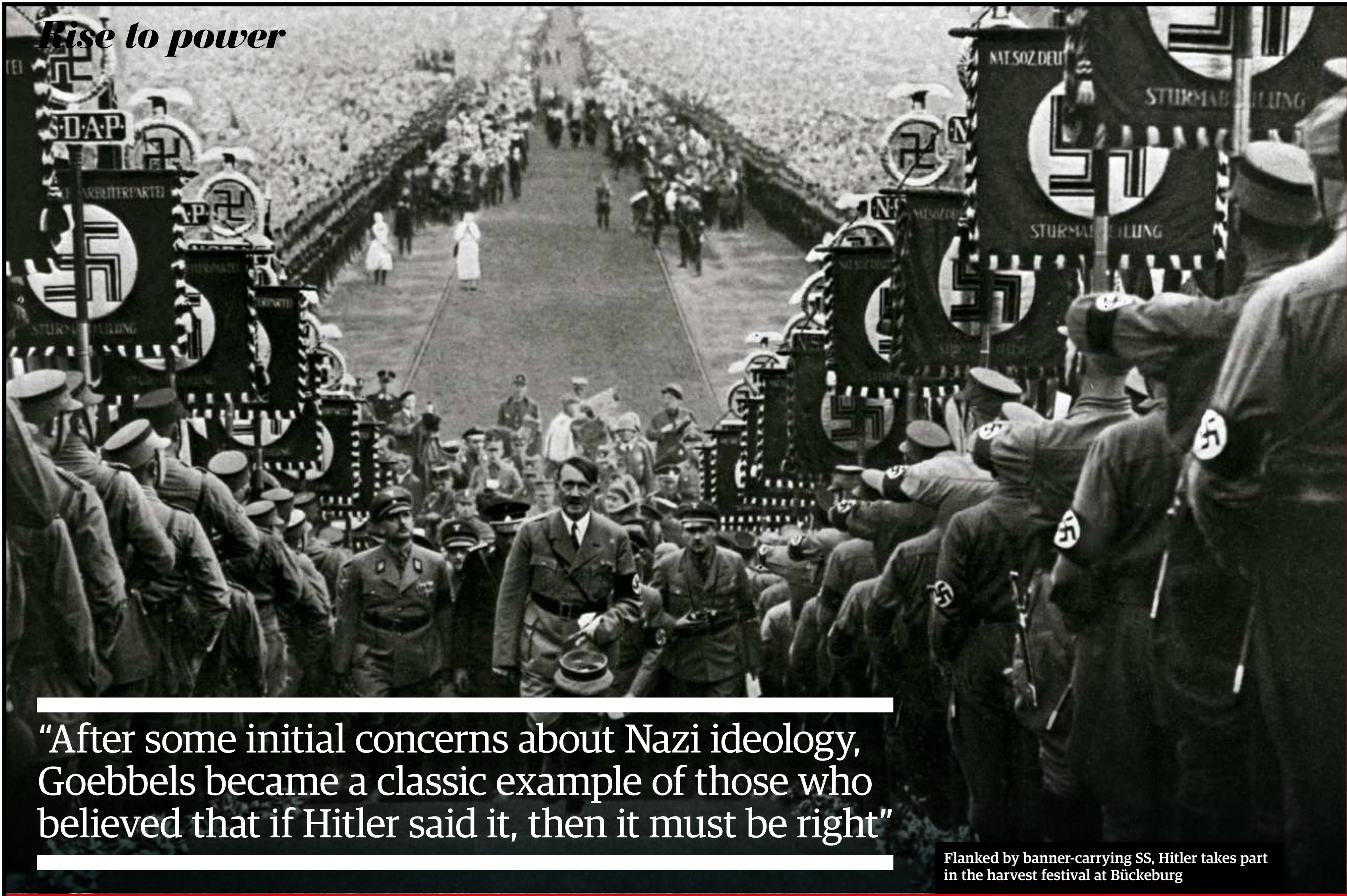
Hitler argued that Jewry also lacked an original culture. While Aryans created culture, Jews invaded, imitated, corrupted and ultimately destroyed it. The Nazis argued this was what had recently happened in Germany. During World War I, while German men were away fighting, Jews undermined traditional German culture at home by introducing damaging modern ideas like Bolshevism and feminism. As a result, the home front collapsed and the war was lost. Here was the extreme right's infamous Dolchstosslegende, or 'stab in the back' theory.

Jews, therefore, were the enemies of Germany and had to be eliminated from society. There were varying suggestions as to what extent this 'elimination' should take place. So too, all German peoples throughout Europe needed to be united in a greater German state and in order to do this, more Lebensraum (living space) had to be acquired. As well as all this, the 'treachery' of the Treaty of Versailles needed to be redressed. Hitler's long-term goals were set.

There were conflicting views about *Mein Kampf* and Hitler's objectives. Economist Johannes Zahn said: "Reading *Mein Kampf* was exactly like belief in the demands of the *Bible*. These are demands but nobody believed they would be fulfilled one hundred per cent." Diplomat Manfred von Schröder said that, "Nobody took it really seriously." Yet Johannes Zahn argued that Jewish influence "had gone too far" in Germany and Herbert Richter, who said that *Mein Kampf* was "too crazy" to even finish reading, also felt that the German territories lost in World War I should be returned. It seemed that Hitler had tapped into a number of common beliefs in *Mein Kampf* – he had just taken them to their extremes. The book sold poorly initially but by 1939 in Germany, it was selling second only to the *Bible*, and by 1945, 10 million copies had been purchased.



The Beer Hall Putsch and Hitler's spell in prison also taught the Nazi Party that the only route to power was through the ballot box. Armed revolution was not the answer. Instead they would beat the system from within, by becoming a part of Germany's democratic system before gaining power and pulling democracy apart. As Hitler said, "If outvoting them takes longer than outshooting them, at least the results will be guaranteed by their own Constitution."



> “After some initial concerns about Nazi ideology, Goebbels became a classic example of those who believed that if Hitler said it, then it must be right”

Flanked by banner-carrying SS, Hitler takes part in the harvest festival at Bückeburg

Hitler's faithful followers

During this period, Hitler had also begun to surround himself with the men who would be crucial to the development of the Nazi movement and within the Nazi government. Joseph Goebbels, who would be devoted to Hitler right through to the apocalyptic, suicidal days inside the Führerbunker in 1945, was an intellectual radical who had a doctorate in German literature. After some initial concerns about Nazi ideology, Goebbels became a classic example of those who believed that if Hitler said it, then it must be right. Hitler, therefore, became a sort of religious figure in whom his followers had faith.

Emotional devotion was valued over rationality and reason, and this tendency characterised Hitler's entire rule. In 1927, Hitler said: “[We] put faith in the first place and not cognition. One has to believe in a cause. Only faith creates a state. What motivates people to go and do battle for religious ideas? Not cognition but blind faith.”

This was certainly a characteristic seen in Goebbels, for upon reading *Mein Kampf*, he declared: “I love him… such a sparkling mind can be my leader. I bow to the greater one, the political genius… Adolf Hitler, I love you because you are great and simple at the same time. What one calls a genius.”

Similar attitudes of blind devotion were expressed by Rudolf Hess, who had joined the Nazi Party in 1920 after already having spent time in Germany's right-wing movement, and Hermann Göring, the World War I flying ace who joined the Nazi Party in 1922. He later became one of the most important men in the Third Reich, initially heading the SA (Stormtroopers), then founding the Gestapo (the Nazi secret police) and heading the Luftwaffe (air force).

Ernst Röhm represented a different type of Nazi. Like Hess and Göring, he had been an early supporter of the movement. He joined the Nazi Party in 1919 and played a key role in the Beer Hall Putsch. He held an important position in the leadership and the establishment of the SA but he saw the journey of the Nazi Party very much as a revolution, even beyond the Putsch, when Hitler had decided to gain power through the political mainstream. To this end, Röhm said, “…since I am an immature and wicked man, war and unrest appeal to me more than good bourgeois order. Brutality is respected, the people need wholesome fear.” While he was one of Hitler's closest friends in the early days of the Nazi movement, he did not see Hitler as a divine leader to whom he had to submit himself. He wanted to pursue his own objectives and power within the party and it was this lack of obedience that ultimately led to his demise in 1934. Gregor Strasser, who, with his brother Otto, wanted to emphasise the Socialist element of National Socialism above all else, similarly tried to strike his own path within the movement and lost out.

Economic crisis

While the profound distress caused by the loss of World War I and the social and economic chaos that followed had inspired a number of Germans to at least give the Nazi Party a hearing, by the mid-1920s conditions had improved and most people had turned away from the extreme fringes of politics. By the late 1920s, however, the instability and turmoil needed by the Nazi Party to present themselves as a viable alternative government had returned.

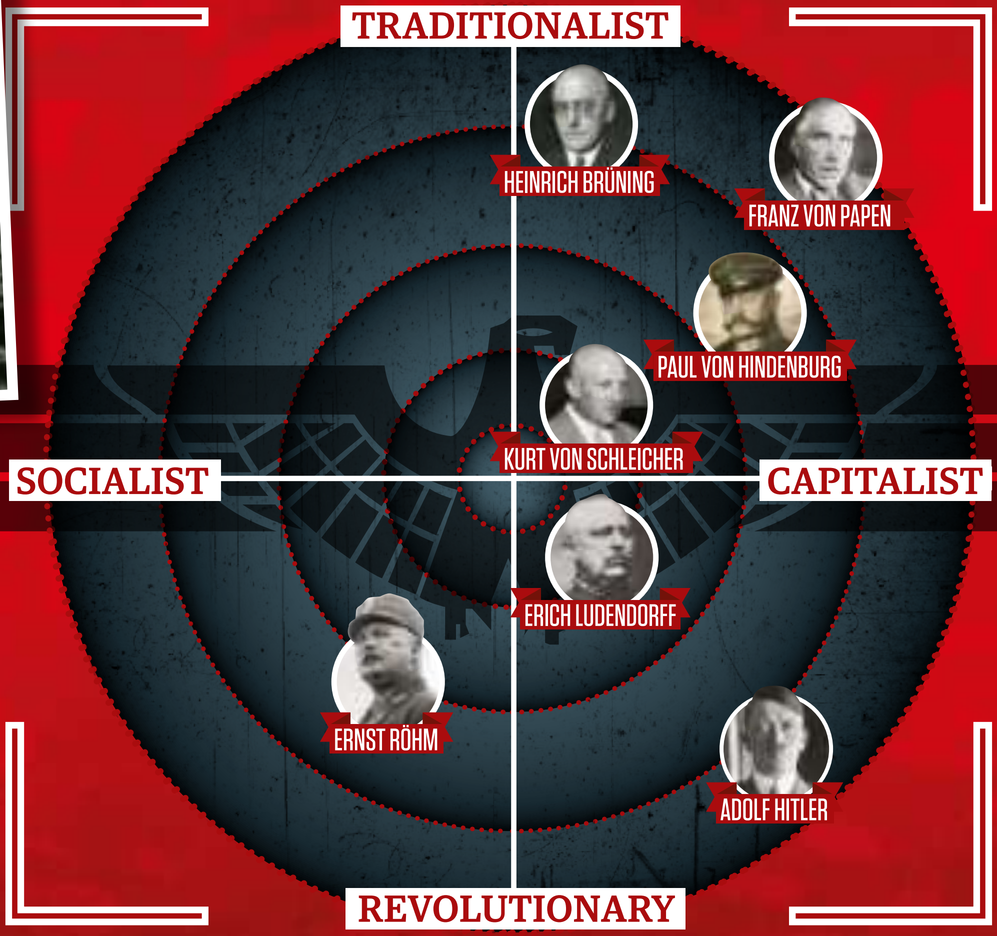
Adolf Hitler addresses massed ranks of soldiers at a Nazi rally held in Dortmund, c.1933

In 1928, food prices on the world market were beginning to drop and German agricultural workers were suffering. Germany's recovery from the disastrous hyperinflation of 1923, itself brought on by Germany's attempts to pay French and British war reparations imposed by the Treaty of Versailles, had been based upon loans from the United States. As the world economy began a downturn, so Germany's already fragile economy was threatened. When the financial markets of Wall Street crashed in 1929, heralding the beginning of the Great Depression, the USA called in its loans and the German economy, like so many economies around the world, went into a major downturn.

The mainstream parties in Germany seemed to offer little hope or constructive help to the general populace as major banks folded and unemployment spiralled out of control. By the end of 1929, about 1.5 million Germans were out of work. Within a year this figure had more than doubled. By early 1933, unemployment in Germany had reached a staggering 6 million. Governmental response had been to cut expenditure, wages and unemployment benefits – a disastrous move. As well as affecting the working class, the economic pain spread to the

AXIS OF THE WEIMAR RIGHT

The German government's key players had different approaches to healing the nation



ADOLF HITLER

Leader of the Nazi Party since the 1920s, Hitler believed in the totalitarian state, preeminent in every way above the individual. Pragmatic in his politics, he was compelled to work together with German industrialists and financiers to consolidate power. However, he loathed capitalism, and promoted the state control of economic and social institutions.

HEINRICH BRÜNING

As chancellor of Weimar Germany from March 1930 to May 1932, Brüning's negotiations with the Nazis failed to produce a coalition government. In his memoirs he claimed to have advocated the restoration of the Hohenzollern monarchy to prevent Hitler from taking control if Hindenburg died in office.

PAUL VON HINDENBURG

The hero of World War I, elderly Hindenburg served two terms as the president of Germany. Considered the conservative choice, Hindenburg became embroiled in the country's post-war political upheaval. In 1933, he signed the Enabling Act, vesting near-dictatorial power in Hitler and becoming complicit in the rise of the Nazi Party.

ERNST RÖHM

A radical socialist, Röhm led the Sturmabteilung, or SA. His ruffians brawled with anti-Nazi factions in the streets. As the SA grew to outnumber the German Army, Hitler perceived it as a threat. Röhm was assassinated and the SA leadership purged during the Night of the Long Knives in 1934.

FRANZ VON PAPEN

A conservative and monarchist who served as chancellor of Weimar Germany in the Weimar Republic from June to November 1932, Papen was largely responsible for convincing Hindenburg to appoint Hitler Chancellor of Germany in 1933, believing that a post in government would keep Hitler and the Nazis under control. He was sadly mistaken.

KURT VON SCHLEICHER

The last chancellor of Weimar Germany, Schleicher was instrumental in rebuilding the German Army in contravention of the Treaty of Versailles. Politically moderate, he attempted to form a centrist coalition government, opposing burgeoning Nazi influence. This move earned Hitler's enmity, resulting in his assassination in 1934 during the Night of the Long Knives.

ERICH LUDENDORFF

An influential army general during World War I, a disillusioned Ludendorff became associated with right-wing political activism during the 1920s and participated in failed coup attempts in 1920 and 1923. Ludendorff served as a National Socialist member of the Reichstag but later warned of the dangers posed by a Nazi government.

middle-class, too. People looked desperately for answers, assistance and hope. The extreme parties seemed to provide answers for extreme times, and the communists and Nazis fought it out on the streets for supremacy.

Hitler was in his element. Nazi party membership rose from 120,000 in 1929 to over 1 million by 1930. In the frequent elections brought about by ongoing instability, the Nazis rose from 2.5 per cent of the vote in 1928 to over 18 per cent in 1930. By 1932, the Nazi Party polled almost 40 per cent of the vote. Hitler's message was for unity for 'true' Germans. He called for a return to the comradeship of the war years. Jutta Rüdiger, who would later lead the League of German Girls, recalled, "I was told that this frontline soldier (Hitler) had said... the only thing that matters is comradeship, the willingness to help and stand by one another."

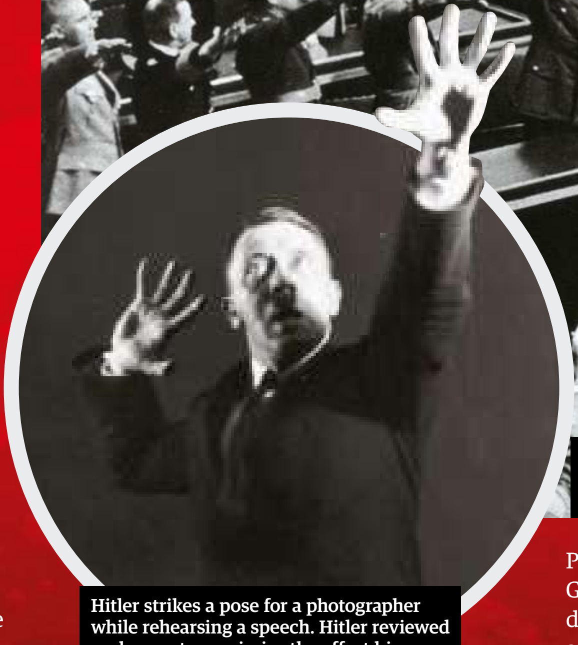
Vote Hitler

In 1932, Hitler challenged the ageing World War I general Paul von Hindenburg for the German presidency. In the chaos of ineffectual government, revolving-door chancellors, economic pain and social upheaval, Hitler ran two impressive presidential campaigns due in large part to the work of his propaganda chief Joseph Goebbels. Hitler became the first politician to travel widely throughout the country by aircraft. Seeming to descend from the heavens as he travelled to as many as five cities a day to speak, the 'Hitler over Germany' campaign was an enormous success.

Striking and effective election posters were put to good use. "Hitler - our last hope," read one. "Workers - the Brow, the Fist - vote for the Front Soldier Hitler!" read another, showing two burly working men gazing fiercely at the viewer. "German women, think of your children - vote Hitler," appealed another, as a fearful female figure clutched her children. One claimed, "Marxism is the guardian angel of Capitalism - vote National Socialist," with capitalism depicted as a smartly dressed, overweight Jewish man, holding a bag of money. These simple posters spoke to everyone - men, women, the population at large - and they zeroed in on a common enemy: the Jew.

However, Germany's political elite was unconvinced that the working-class corporal, as they saw him, was the man for the job. With the country's social, political and economic chaos continuing to press in though, steps had to be taken. Believing they could control Hitler and the excesses of the Nazis if they were contained within government rather than agitating from outside, Hindenburg consented to Hitler becoming chancellor of Germany with Franz von Papen, a conservative, as vice chancellor.

Newly elected German Chancellor Adolf Hitler being cheered by deputies during the first Reichstag session, 21 May 1933



Hitler strikes a pose for a photographer while rehearsing a speech. Hitler reviewed each pose to maximise the effect his words would have on the German people

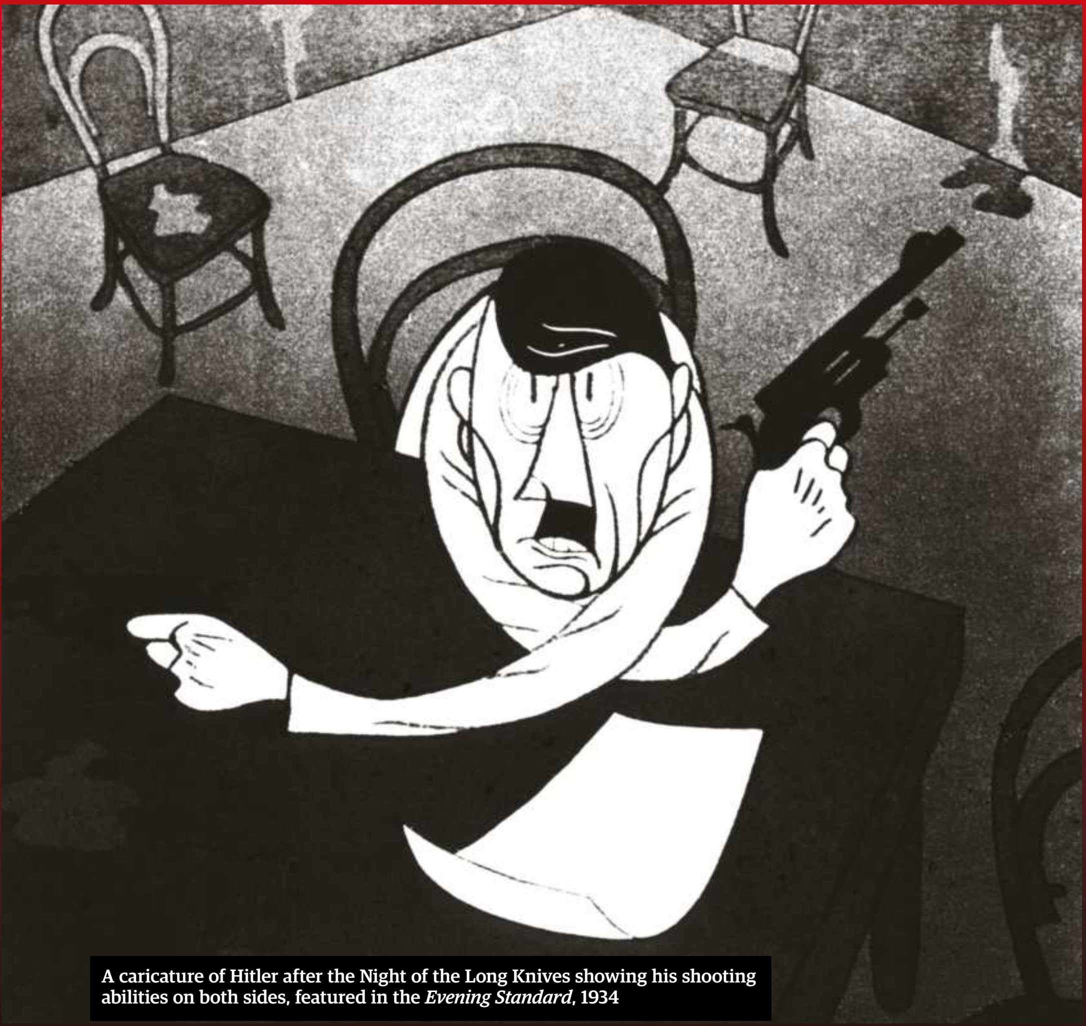
The error of their ways was swiftly realised. Less than a month after Hitler's appointment as German chancellor on 30 January 1933, Berlin's Reichstag building caught fire. A Dutch communist, Marinus van der Lubbe, was blamed but there were rumours of Nazi involvement. It was the final sign of total national emergency according to Hitler. The Enabling Act was passed on 24 March 1933. It allowed for the power to make laws without parliamentary passage through the Reichstag. Hitler proclaimed the Nazi Party was the only political party permitted in Germany. All other parties and trade unions were disbanded. Individual German states lost any autonomous powers, and Nazi officials became state governors. Jews were declared 'non-Aryans' and as such were banned from teaching, the civil service, the military and owning businesses. The first concentration camp at Dachau, near Munich, was opened on 21 March 1933. Hitler was now effectively dictator of Germany, and the nation a totalitarian police state.

With his external enemies under control, Hitler turned his attention to the enemies within his own ranks. Hitler decided to act against Ernst Röhm, who had continued to agitate for a greater slice of power. He would not be subservient to the Führer and he believed the Stormtroopers should be merged with the German Army and fall under his command. Himmler and Göring concocted false evidence that Röhm was planning a coup. Hindenburg demanded that Hitler react. On 30 June 1934, Röhm and the SA leadership were executed along with anyone who Hitler felt had crossed him on his rise to power; Gregor Strasser was included on that list.

Hitler's blood-soaked Third Reich had begun.

Hitler as a commanding presence during a Nazi rally, c.1933

> "Hitler's message was for unity for 'true' Germans. He called for a return to the comradeship of the war years"



A caricature of Hitler after the Night of the Long Knives showing his shooting abilities on both sides, featured in the *Evening Standard*, 1934

INSIDE THE NAZI TERROR STATE

Hitler sought to control every aspect of German life to maintain his grip on power

PERSUASIVE PROPAGANDA

The Nazis utilised a systematic campaign to promote their ideology and persecute perceived enemies of the German people. Propaganda effectively engendered loyalty to the Nazi state, embodied by Hitler. "One Reich, one people, one Führer!"

CONSOLIDATION OF GOVERNMENT

As chancellor, Hitler abolished the office of president and declared himself Führer. He effectively assumed the role of dictator as he suspended personal liberties, eliminated enemies and silenced opposition.

RELIGIOUS REDIRECTION

Realising religion was significant in the lives of many Germans, the Nazis were careful not to risk open hostility against the mainstream church. However, they utilised nationalism and the figure of Hitler as 'saviour' to conjure 'religious' fervour.

RESOLUTE YOUTH

Young people belonged to greater Germany. The Führer once told a gathering of Hitler Youth that they were Germany's future, required to be "hard as Krupp steel." From classrooms and into the fabric of family, the state held sway.

REIGN OF TERROR

A pillar of Nazi rule, terror gripped Germany. Threats of imprisonment, torture, or death were real for those who dared to dissent. The Nazi secret police, or Gestapo, seemed everywhere. Neighbours turned against neighbours.

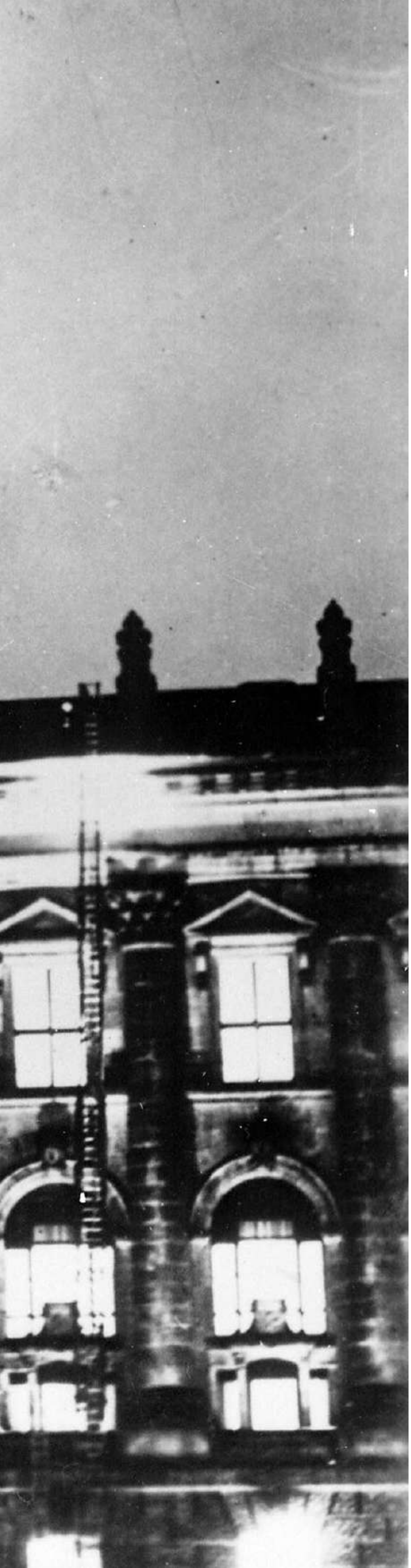
THE WORKING MASSES

The Nazis abolished trade unions, absorbing their memberships into the Reich Labour Front. They also capitalised on mass unemployment to generate work projects and state-controlled jobs to create the illusion of long-term prosperity.

COERCIVE CULTURE

Art, literature, music, or any form of expression deemed decadent or subversive was consigned to the flaming pyre. Every aspect of German culture, from sculpture to architecture, science and social interaction, reflected the Nazi world view.

DEM DEUTSCHEN VOLKE



THE REICHSTAG FIRE

A remarkable stroke of fortune sealed the fate of a Nazi scheme for domination of democracy

Written by David Foley

Hitler was chancellor, but he did not yet have the power he craved. The Nazis had just about played by the rules in ascending the political ladder, but the rules would need to be cast aside for them to truly take control of the nation. Hitler was only heading a coalition government, which was not nearly enough for his plans. In his cabinet, for instance, he could only call on the support of two fellow Nazis, Hermann Göring and Wilhelm Frick.

In order to take the next step, Hitler needed to dismantle the structure of German democracy. To this end he proposed new elections for the Reichstag, hoping to get a majority. This would allow him to pass an Enabling Act, giving him sweeping powers over the nation.

Hitler approached Paul von Hindenburg, the German President, to authorise new elections and they were set for 5 March 1933. There was not much time to mobilise support for the Nazis, but Hitler hoped the election would give him the majority he needed. Campaigning, as was the Nazi way, was more a matter of negativity than positivity. The party laid out what it stood against and what it would tear down, rather than what it stood for and what it would build. In the tense atmosphere, amid the desperation caused by the economic crisis, this message played well. The question was whether it would play well enough to put the Nazis in control of the government.

Hitler was open in his desire for an Enabling Act. The country was facing a communist threat, he claimed, and only dictatorial powers could save the day. An Enabling Act was only intended to be wheeled out at times of genuine crisis, but the Nazi propaganda machine was doing a good job of making it feel very much like a crisis was gripping the nation. Despite this, the omens for the election were not good until a suspiciously convenient stroke of fortune turned the situation on its head.

The lone arson

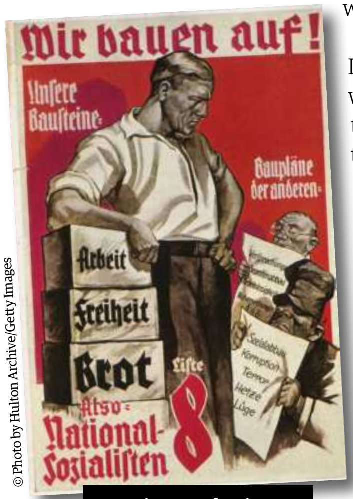
On the night of 27–28 February 1933, German radio stations all began to broadcast the same message: "The Reichstag is in flames". A single culprit was arrested (although another man was seen fleeing the scene), but Hitler was convinced from the start that this was a communist plot to strike at

© Wiki

the heart of German democracy. Conveniently forgetting that he was planning a far more potent strike against that democracy, he brushed off any suggestion that the arsonist had been a lone wolf. “This fire is a God-given signal,” he ranted. “It is the work of the Reds. We must crush these murderous pests with an iron fist.”

The fire was on a huge scale, which would later raise doubts about the likelihood of it being the work of a single arsonist. More importantly, it gave Hitler an excuse to introduce repressive legislation. This was claimed to be necessary to prevent a communist revolution in Germany, but in fact it was aimed at securing the desired election result on 5 March.

Right from the start, conspiracy theories developed that the Nazis had planned the fire themselves, in a ‘false flag’ operation. Rival theories would be debated for decades after the event, but there is no doubt which political faction benefited.



© Photo by Hulton Archive/Getty Images

A Nazi Party election poster from circa 1933

The three main theories - the lone arsonist, the communist plot and the Nazi false flag operation - all had intriguing elements to back them up. The captured individual was a 24-year-old Dutch former stonemason called Marinus van der Lubbe. He had been badly injured in an accident, which had forced him to leave his profession, and there were also reports that he was mentally ill. More importantly, in the context of the event, he was a communist. This link with the communists, and the fact that another man had been seen running away (possibly van der Lubbe’s communist ‘handler’) was strong circumstantial evidence.

There was also the fact that the fire appeared far too extensive to have been accomplished without help. The amount of materials needed and the scope of the preparations seemed totally unfeasible for a man working alone. The question raised by this line of thinking was obvious: who had helped van der Lubbe?

Following his interrogation by Detective Walter Zirpins, a report was issued on 3 March concluding that he had acted alone, but that he may have received encouragement, instructions or assistance from others.

Another detective, Helmut Heisig, travelled to the Netherlands to investigate van der Lubbe’s background and was reported in the Dutch press as saying: “So far as it is possible to currently make a judgement, [van der Lubbe] lit the fire, but carried out the preparatory measures with accomplices.” Another paper reported Heisig as saying, “It is in any case clear that [van der Lubbe] did not hatch the plan for the arson alone.” Whatever the truth, the Nazis had already taken advantage of the situation.

A free hand

The day after the fire, Hitler persuaded von Hindenburg to pass the ‘Decree of Reich President von Hindenburg for the Protection of People and State’. It is more commonly known as the ‘Reichstag Fire Decree’. With a week until the election, the decree gave the Nazis the power to intimidate their political opponents, most notably the communists.

© Photo by Imagno/Getty Images

Dr Wilhelm Buenger, who condemned van der Lubbe to death

THE BROWN BOOK

The communists were quick to strike back against the Nazi narrative that they were responsible for the fire

In the aftermath of the fire, communist propaganda got a headstart on the Nazis with the publication of a book claiming it was all a Nazi conspiracy. *The Brown Book of the Reichstag Fire and Hitler Terror*, organised by the communist Willi Münzenberg, was published in the summer of 1933. The book argued that van der Lubbe had indeed received assistance in setting the fire, but that it had come from the Nazis.

Van der Lubbe’s life was presented in some detail, referring to him as ‘The Tool’. The book painted a picture of a somewhat aimless man who was also homosexual, and who boasted of attempting to swim the Channel, with no evidence that he actually had.

The book stated that van der Lubbe met Ernst Röhm and other prominent Nazis while in Munich towards the end of 1931, which would establish a link between the arsonist and the Nazis. “His friends,” the book claimed, “are unanimous in their statements that Lubbe received many letters from Germany, and that he always tried to conceal these letters from his friends.”

© Photo by Keystone-France/Gamma-Keystone via Getty Images

Marinus van der Lubbe

Van der Lubbe’s landlady is also reported as saying that he commented on a planned trip to Germany in early 1933, saying that he had “something important to do in Germany,” which is just the sort of circumstantial evidence to bring a conspiracy theory to life.

Although many of its claims are now disputed, the book was a masterful piece of propaganda and became the bedrock for the enduring idea that the Nazis had organised the fire themselves.

The Reichstag after the war, burned out and damaged by Allied bombing raids

© Photo by William Vandivert/The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images

Van der Lubbe slumps in his chair during his trial

© Photo by Keystone-France/Gamma-Keystone via Getty Images

> “There was no limit to the length of time a person could be held, and they could be rearrested at any time after their release”

Police powers were significantly enhanced. Known communists could be arrested and held without trial, and the concentration camp system would grow out of the need to hold thousands of interned people. There was no limit to the length of time a person could be held, and they could be rearrested at any time after their release.

With this level of intimidation, implemented in part by the brownshirts of the Sturmabteilung (SA) as well as the police, the Nazis inched closer towards their goal. The election result, however, was not perfect. The Nazis were the biggest party with 43.9 per cent of the vote, but they had failed to get their outright majority even with all the strong-arm tactics employed. Their share of the vote translated into 288 seats in the new government under the proportional representation system. The Socialists finished second with 120 seats, while the communist KPD still managed 81 seats. Hitler now had to turn to the weak moderates, the Catholic Centre Party (74 seats) and the National People’s Party (52 seats). Along with threatening or arresting the socialist and communist representatives to limit their votes, support from the centre would give Hitler the two-thirds majority needed to pass the Enabling Act, which would allow him to sideline the Reichstag completely.

In the event, Hitler achieved a far more substantial victory. Only 94 Socialists voted against the act, the remainder having been imprisoned or intimidated, while all of the communists were in custody at the time of the vote. The Enabling Act was passed on 23 March. Hitler had the power he had desired for so long.

The question of guilt

The trial of Marinus van der Lubbe started on 21 September 1933. From the start it seemed clear it was not going to go well for the Nazis. The four communist leaders indicted alongside him were clearly going to avoid conviction, and van der Lubbe could therefore be portrayed by enemies of the Nazis as a lone arsonist with no significant ties to the communists.

The Nazis moved quickly to limit the impact of this, briefing the press to present van der Lubbe as a representation of the communist menace. A conviction of him was to be presented as a conviction of the communist party, whatever happened to his fellow defendants. As the trial played out, van der Lubbe was the only man to be convicted, and he was executed on 10 January 1934.

Controversy over the details of the Reichstag fire continues to swirl. In the 1960s the former diplomat and intelligence officer Hans Bernd Gisevius wrote a book and articles claiming that a former Sturmabteilung member, Hans Georg Gewehr, had set the fire. Gisevius subsequently lost a libel trial, but recent research, helped by the release of documents, has opened the debate once more. It is a debate that has been complicated by fabricated evidence and political motivations, and it will probably never be possible to know whether or not van der Lubbe acted alone, with direct assistance, or with mere guidance.

What is not debated is the impact that the fire had on German history. With the Nazis achieving their goals by such a slender margin, it is possible that the Reichstag fire was the deciding factor, the final impetus that pushed them over the line. Whether it was a stroke of incredible good fortune, or the result of a cynical Nazi plot, it helped bring Hitler to power.

Bluffer's Guide

GERMANY, 30 JUNE – 2 JULY 1934

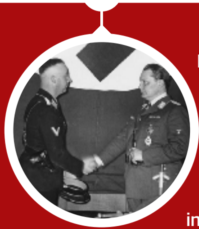
NIGHT OF THE LONG KNIVES

Timeline

28 FEBRUARY 1934

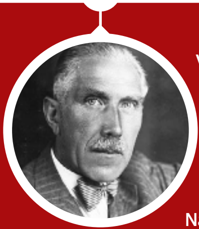
Adolf Hitler orders the SA to become subordinate to the Reichswehr. SA leader Ernst Röhm agrees but privately vows to defy the command.

20 APRIL 1934



Hermann Göring transfers control of the Gestapo to SS chief Himmler, while the latter quietly restructures his organisation into a force independent of the SA.

17 JUNE 1934



Vice Chancellor von Papen speaks at Marburg University against SA terror. His subsequent threat of resignation risks the end of the Nazi government.

30 JUNE 1934

Hitler arrives at the Hotel Hanselbauer in Bad Wiessee, Röhm is arrested along with the SA leadership and taken to Stadelheim Prison in Munich.

Hitler salutes a parade of SA troopers in 1930

Night of the Long Knives

What was it?

After more than a year in power, the Nazi regime closed ranks. It undertook a "blood purge" of the party's paramilitary wing, the Sturmabteilung (SA), commonly known as the Brownshirts. The SA's leader Ernst Röhm was personally arrested by Adolf Hitler in the early hours of 30 June in a hotel outside Munich. Members of his entourage – found suggestively sharing beds – were also rounded up and executed. This was immediately followed by similar action in Berlin with Hermann Göring dispatching elite Schutzstaffel (SS) execution squads to take out "undisciplined and disobedient characters and asocial or diseased elements".

At least 85 people are known to have died, with the Nazis taking the opportunity to also settle scores with old political rivals. Former chancellor Kurt von Schleicher was gunned down in his home with his wife. Members of the key Catholic Centre Party, a Bavarian politician essential to the failure of Hitler's 1923 Beer Hall Putsch and even a music critic (in a case of mistaken identity) were also killed.

Why did it happen?

As the violent vanguard of the National Socialist movement, the Brownshirts were essential to the party's ascent to power. By 1934, the ranks of the fighting organisation had swelled to around four million, dwarfing the muzzled Reichswehr, Germany's military.

Röhm's frequent talk of absorbing the army alarmed the conservative generals and President Hindenburg, and his calls for a 'second revolution', emphasising the socialist aspect of National Socialism, made him few political allies. The unruly peacetime behaviour of SA members persisted as a threat to the stability that the Nazis had promised to usher in with their leadership. Rumours of a Röhm-led coup against Hitler were stoked with evidence of French involvement that had been manufactured by the SS. The old guard had outlived their usefulness.

Acting against Röhm enabled Hitler to demonstrate his power while demanding allegiance, consolidating his control of the party and presenting himself as the solution to the chaos the Nazis had done so much to ferment.

Who was involved?

Adolf Hitler

20 April 1889 – 30 April 1945

Hitler personally led the putsch, intent on confronting the SA threat and securing himself as the arbiter of Germany's destiny.

Ernst Röhm

28 November 1887 – 1 July 1934

Once Hitler's trusted accomplice, Röhm's fall from grace took him to an ignominious end in a cold prison cell.

Heinrich Himmler

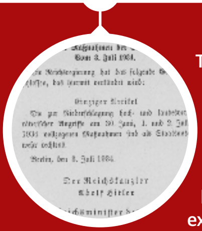
7 October 1900 – 23 May 1945

Proving his allegiance and strengthening his position within the Nazi hierarchy, Himmler directed the SS intervention against Röhm.

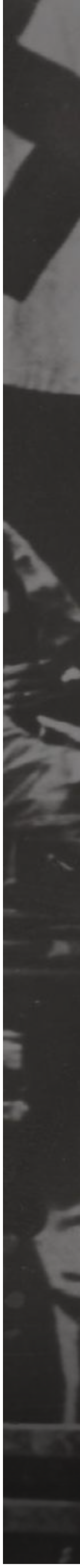
1 JULY 1934

Given the option of an "honourable suicide", Röhm refuses. At 2.40pm, he is executed in his cell by two SS men.

3 JULY 1934



The Law Regarding Measures for Emergency State Defence is passed, retroactively legalising the extrajudicial killings.



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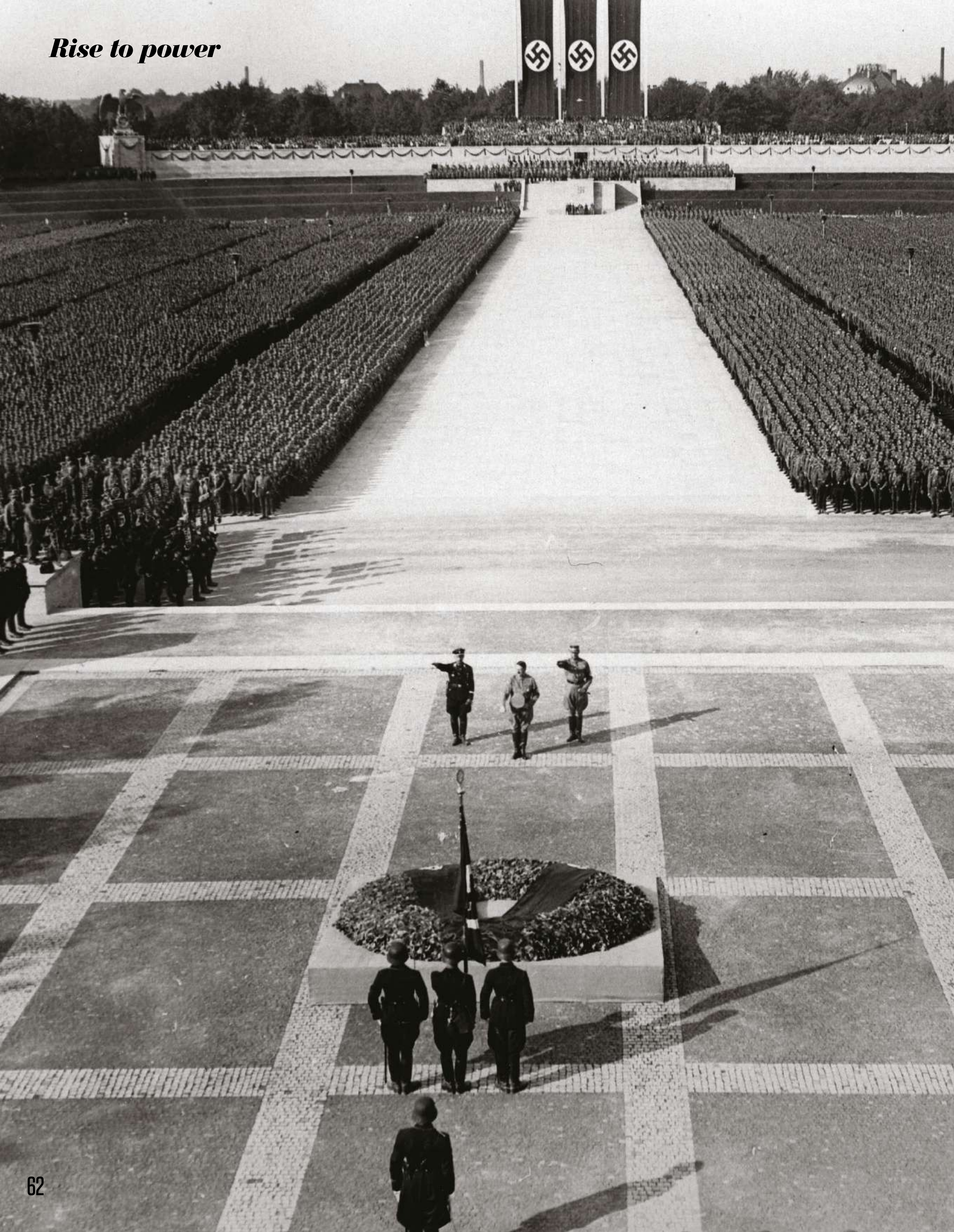

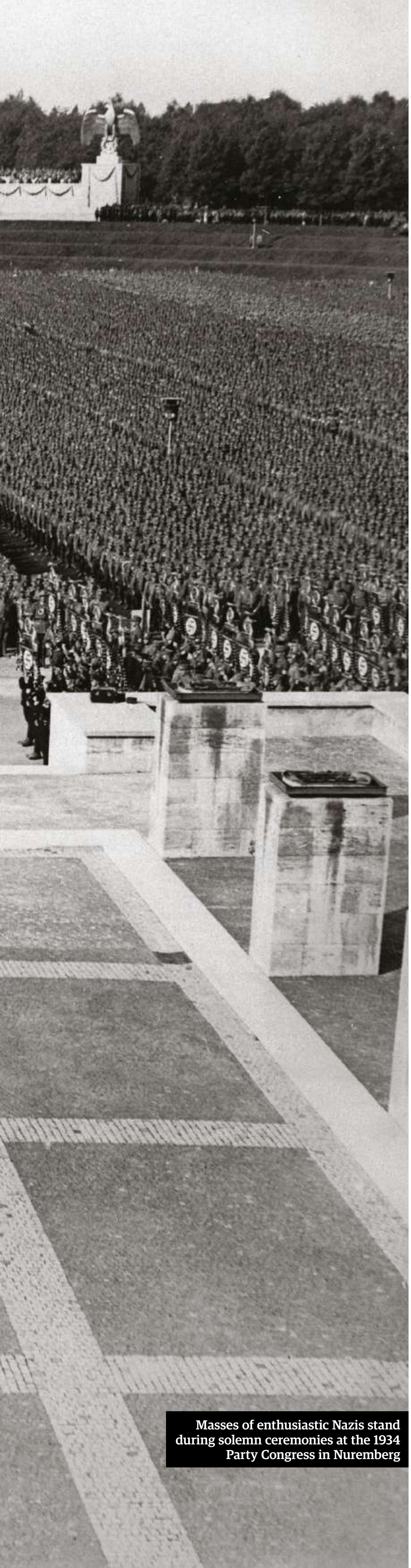

Masses of enthusiastic Nazis stand during solemn ceremonies at the 1934 Party Congress in Nuremberg

FORGING THE NAZI STATE

How Hitler developed the concept of 'gleichschaltung' to consolidate absolute power

Written by Michael Haskew

Perhaps the greatest case of political underestimation in the 20th century reached its climax on 30 January 1933, as Adolf Hitler was proclaimed Chancellor of Germany. In a deal brokered to keep the Nazi leader in check, conservative politicians handed the reins of government to a shrewd, ruthless would-be dictator.

Former chancellor Franz von Papen had assured a colleague, "Within two months, we will have pushed Hitler so far in a corner that he'll squeak." As it was, Hitler swiftly turned the tables on von Papen and his allies, as well as the power base of German industrialists who believed the Nazi leader would be good for business and the senior commanders of the German Army who hoped his denunciation of the Versailles Treaty would lead to rearmament and the restoration of the nation's military prestige in the wake of World War I.

On the night of Hitler's ascension, Nazi Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels watched with glee as thousands of Nazi loyalists marched by torchlight, celebrating their party's rise to power. Hitler, their Führer, had proclaimed, "I will employ my strength for the welfare of the German people, protect the constitution and laws of the German people, conscientiously discharge the duties imposed on me, and conduct my affairs of office impartially and with justice to everyone."

Goebbels, the brilliant architect of the propaganda machine that propelled Hitler to power in the blink of a political eye, knew what was to come. He noted in his diary, "It is almost like a dream - a fairytale. The new Reich has been born. Fourteen years of work have been crowned with victory. The German revolution has begun!" Embedded in that revolution was the concept of 'gleichschaltung', meaning literally 'coordination'.

Through persuasion and propaganda, bolstered by the burgeoning cult of personality that surrounded Hitler, the Nazis reshaped German society, and with it the world view of a nation - and they accomplished it with startling efficiency. Within months of taking power and following the death in 1934 of Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg, the venerated war hero and president of Weimar Germany, Hitler abolished the office of president and consolidated political power in

© Getty

himself. Concurrently, the Nazis leveraged the Reichstag fire, on 27 February 1933, casting the blame on the communists and suspending civil liberties in the name of security. They further quashed dissent and took control of the press.

Promise of a new order

In their desire for political and economic stability and the restoration of national pride, the German people were captivated by Hitler's oratory. They were mesmerised by his promises of a new order, rising from the ashes of deceit that had resulted in the defeat of Germany in WWI. Hitler and Goebbels utilised the perfect storm of defeat, heavy war reparations that the nation could not hope to repay, the economic debacle of the Great Depression, and the desire for a national resurgence to reinvigorate the German people. Germany had lost the war, the Nazis asserted, due to the machinations of a vast communist conspiracy. The Jews, they argued, were complicit and controlled the German economy, taking advantage of the people for their own gain. Under Nazi leadership, Hitler promised a renaissance of German unity and national pride.

Goebbels effectively created and delivered the message of "Ein Volk, Ein Reich, Ein Führer!" or "One people, one state, one leader!" and proclaimed that Hitler was the embodiment of that new German state. Loyalty to Germany meant loyalty to Hitler. The essence of gleichschaltung - itself a new word - was the elimination of diversity and the consolidation of the individual into the greater being of the state itself. The concept became pervasive, and every aspect of German life - political, social, religious, cultural, athletic, or educational - was touched. Public policy and institutions were reshaped to serve the Nazi state, and the German people willingly surrendered their civil liberties in pursuit of the glorious future embodied in Hitler and promulgated by Goebbels.

The day after the Reichstag fire, Hitler persuaded President Hindenburg to proclaim the Decree of the Reich President for the Protection of the People and State, which suspended numerous civil rights and granted sweeping powers to the government. The Nazis later used the decree as a basis for rounding up political opponents. Although the Nazis were a minority party in the Reichstag, Hitler wasted no time. Without the immediate authority to change the nation's constitution, on 23 March 1933, less than two months after taking office, the chancellor proposed the Law for the Removal of Distress from the People and the Reich. Popularly remembered as the 'Enabling Law', it proclaimed that in addition to the procedures of the constitution, the government of the Reich was also empowered to enact laws. Furthermore, these laws could deviate from the constitution. With its enactment, the Enabling Law allowed Hitler to relegate the Reichstag to a secondary political position.

Under the spell of Goebbels' propaganda, the German people systematically surrendered themselves to Nazi ideology. In the spring of 1933, trade unions were dismantled, their leaders imprisoned and their membership merged into a single, unified organisation dominated by the government and known as the German Labour Front. By mid-July, the Nazi Party was the only legal political party in Germany. In December, the Law to ensure the Unity of the Party and State established that the Nazi Party and the German nation were one in the same. By early 1934, local legislative bodies within the German states, or

Adolf Hitler greets an adoring throng of German civilians from the 'pedestal' of his open-top Mercedes

© Getty

> "The Nazis used grandiose spectacle, with torchlight parades and massive rallies, to conjure up a pseudo-religious fervour"

Members of the Hitler Youth participate in a parade. German boys were required to join the organisation

© Getty

provinces, were abolished and local governments subordinated to the central Nazi interior ministry.

Amid the wave of propaganda and the continual intrusion of the government into the daily lives of average Germans, from their workplace to their houses of worship, and even into their bedrooms, the people either applauded or tacitly supported the elimination of 'subversive' elements in German society. They approved of the brutal suppression of the communists, became complicit in the establishment of a police state by spying on their neighbours, and either enthusiastically joined in the persecution of Jews and other minorities or acquiesced to it. Perhaps the most telling aspect of Goebbels' campaign was the identification and systematic persecution of the Jewish population of Germany and later all of Europe. Such scapegoating provided a focus, an internal energy, for the rising popularity of the Nazis among average Germans.

By the summer of 1934, Hitler was, however, compelled to act against a growing threat from within his own ranks. Recognising the need to maintain relations with the army, he simultaneously dealt with the senior officers' concerns regarding the influence of Ernst Röhm's Sturmabteilung (SA), or Brownshirts, and eliminated a threat to his own power. The SA's leaders were murdered in the bloody purge of 30 June 1934, which became known as the Night of the Long Knives. Other political foes, including former chancellor Kurt von Schleicher, were assassinated. The Nazi-controlled press proclaimed the action as a necessary elimination of enemies of the state, and therefore enemies of the people.

The effective amalgamation of Nazi ideology with the German people solidified Hitler's position as dictator and facilitated his agenda of territorial expansion and the coming of World War II. Although the rearmament of the German military had been progressing covertly, Hitler publicly repudiated the Versailles Treaty in 1935, revealing to the world that the Nazi war machine was a threat to peace. However, within a remarkably short period, Hitler had taken control not only of the German political apparatus but also virtually every aspect of life in a police state.

Hitler as 'saviour'

The continual message of Nazi propaganda fuelled Hitler's consolidation of power, while the party leadership shrewdly recognised that religion remained a significant component of everyday life in Germany. Rather than directly confronting the church and risking the alienation of many Germans, the Nazis used grandiose spectacle, with torchlight parades and massive rallies, plus hypernationalism imbued with the superiority of the Aryan race, and the promotion of Hitler as the nation's 'saviour', to conjure up a pseudo-religious fervour. The Nazis zealously pursued the youth of Germany, mandating that young people belong to organisations affiliated with the party. The Führer once proclaimed to a gathering of the Hitler Youth that they were required to become as "hard as Krupp steel", and they followed en masse.

The Nazis skilfully utilised the economic chaos of the Great Depression to eliminate trade unions and establish the Reich Labour Front, while initiating massive projects to generate state-controlled jobs and create the illusion of a return to prosperity. At the same time, Goebbels and his propagandists were instrumental in developing a coercive culture that extolled the virtues of Nazi and Aryan art, literature, music and science. Women were exploited – told their duty lay in producing babies to ensure the Reich's future.

Through it all, an undercurrent of state-sponsored fear simmered. The Nazis recognised that terror was a powerful tool in controlling the masses, and the development of the police state provided the muscle that made the absolute power of the Nazi Party a way of life. The achievement of gleichschaltung, thus, remains as impressive as it is chilling, a warning to future generations.

DISMANTLING THE NAZI ORDER

After World War II, the Allies embarked on a programme to rid Germany of its Nazi culture

When President Franklin D Roosevelt, Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Premier Joseph Stalin met at Yalta in the Crimea in 1945, they expressed their desire, and that of the free world, for the eradication of Nazi ideology to ensure future peace. Hand in hand with this desire came the necessity to "denazify" Germany – to remove Nazi officials, promote the restoration of accepted social principles, and minimise the influence of those resolute Nazis whose allegiance to the party persisted.

As time progressed and the political landscape of the Cold War began to emerge, the zeal with which denazification was pursued diminished, some amnesties were granted, and the task of continuing the process was handed to the Germans themselves. Between 1945 and 1950, more than 400,000 Germans were held in camps without specific charges at times and pending case by case reviews.

Within months of the end of World War II, the Germans had established tribunals and commissions to deal with the remnants of the Nazi Party in their country, and in January 1946, Allied Control Council Directive No. 24 specified the "removal from office and from positions of responsibility of Nazis and of persons hostile to Allied purposes". Two months later, Law 104 for the Liberation from National Socialism and Militarism established guidelines for dealing with denazification. Five categories of individuals were identified, including major offenders, offenders, lesser offenders, followers and persons exonerated.

In October 1950, the West German government adopted a uniform process for the completion of the denazification effort.

HITLER'S WAR ON ART

Inside the 1937 exhibition of ‘degenerate art’ that the Nazis loved to hate

Written by Philippa Grafton

“The ‘Degenerate Art’ exhibition is a gigantic success and a deadly blow,” wrote Joseph Goebbels on 24 July 1937, five days after the show's opening.

A hit in the eyes of Hitler's right-hand man and propaganda minister, the Degenerate Art exhibition was unlike any other exposition that had been put on in Germany before. This, after all, was one exhibition no artist wanted to be a part of, driven by hate, revulsion, rejection and, above all, retribution.

In the wake of World War I, Germany was a shattered nation. Lumped with crippling war reparations and led by an incompetent government, the country was tumbling into ruin. The emergence of a young and unqualified nobody called Adolf Hitler onto the political scene, however, soon changed the country's fortunes. Within years Hitler had soared through German politics and by 1934 he had manipulated his position and named himself Führer, and with this new title came absolute power.

But before his meteoric rise in politics, Hitler had dreamt of an entirely different life. In 1907 Hitler applied to the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, determined to pursue a career as an artist. He was rejected, but the young man was determined and applied again the following year. Once again he was rebuffed, beaten to this prize place by more expressive, experimental artists.

His creative ambition now relegated to a mere pipe dream, Hitler was bitter – and hellbent on revenge.

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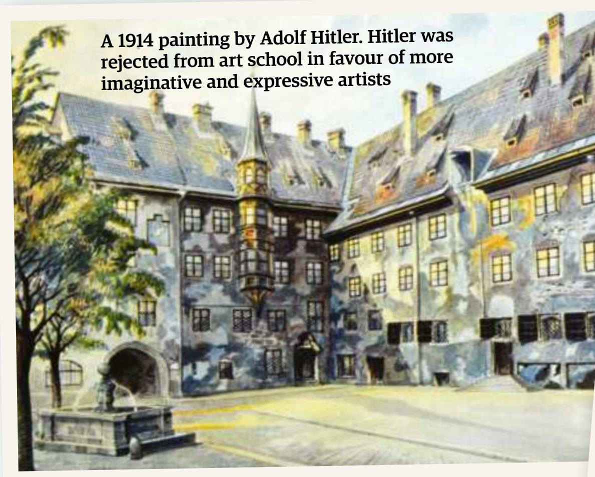
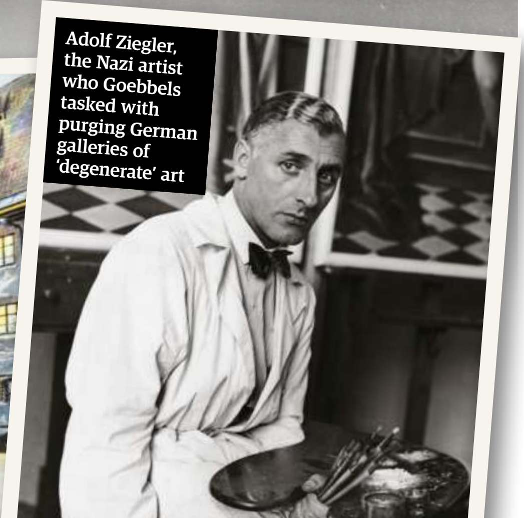
Hitler and Goebbels take a tour of the the exhibition



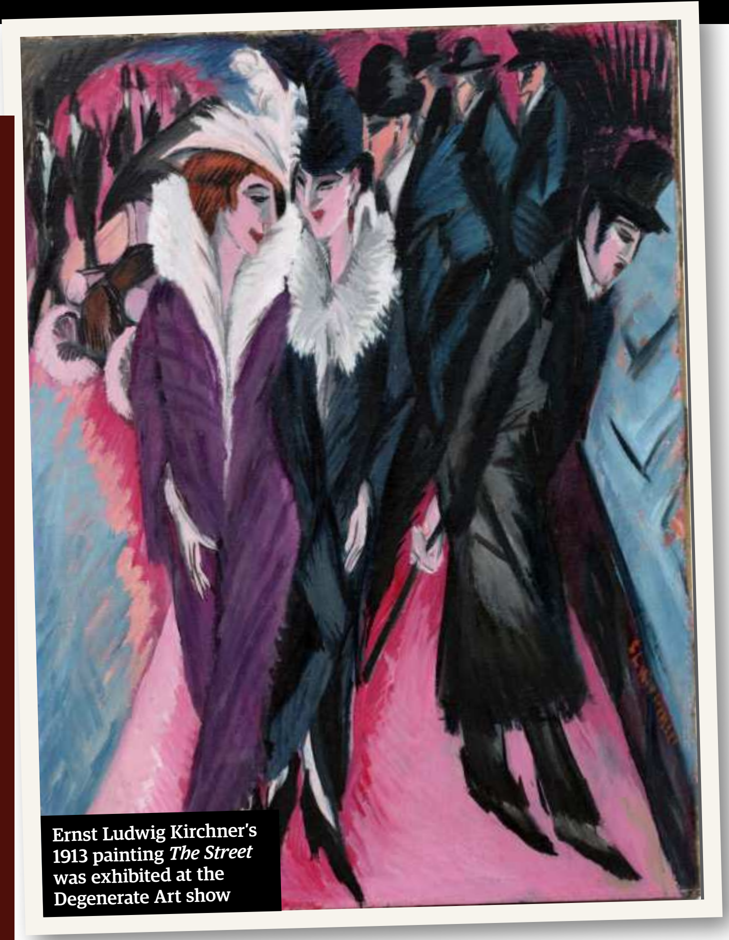
A 1914 painting by Adolf Hitler. Hitler was rejected from art school in favour of more imaginative and expressive artists



Adolf Ziegler, the Nazi artist who Goebbels tasked with purging German galleries of 'degenerate' art

Upon achieving ultimate power, Hitler was determined to make Germany his own aesthetic paradise. While prized Nazi architects, such as Paul Ludwig Troost and later Albert Speer, embarked on transforming Germany into a neoclassical haven, Hitler was preparing to strike his vengeful blow upon the art world that had rejected him nearly two decades before.

In September 1933, Hitler had set up the Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, with Joseph Goebbels at the



Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's 1913 painting *The Street* was exhibited at the Degenerate Art show

helm. Finally Hitler had a means of ridding Germany of so-called 'degenerate' art, and Goebbels was tasked with pruning gallery collections, leaving only 'true' art. Goebbels, however, didn't share Hitler's artistic vision.

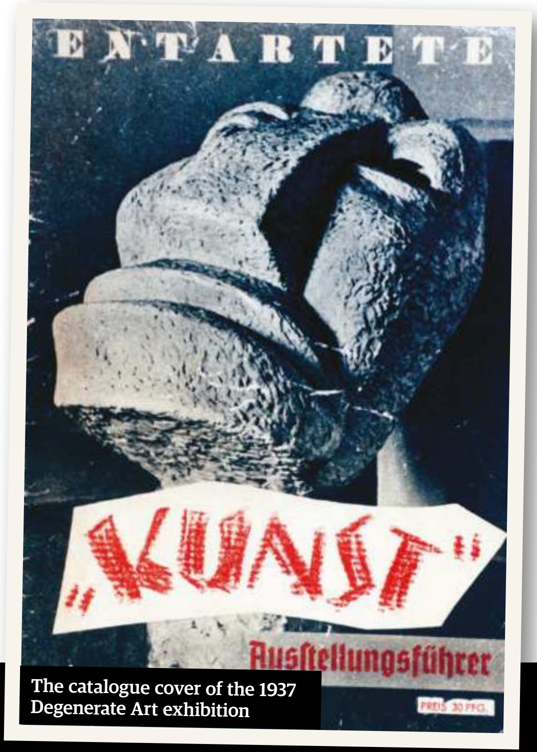
A divide sprung up in the Nazi Party on the topic of expressionism – on one side stood Goebbels, an enthusiastic patron of expressionist painters, and on the other loomed the prominent Nazi theorist Alfred Rosenberg, who saw expressionism as the decay of humanity. After a year of fierce feuding, the matter was resolved when Hitler finally sided with Rosenberg, condemning expressionism as the antithesis of Nazi ideology.

In celebration of Nazi-approved art, the Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda planned a brand-new annual exhibit, the Great German Art exhibition, intended to celebrate the 'true' artists of the Third Reich. Artists were invited to submit their works to a judging panel and of the thousands of submissions, over 600 artworks were chosen to feature. In the weeks leading up to this illustrious exhibition, however, Hitler visited Munich's House of Art, where the exhibition was to be held. The visit did not go to plan, with Goebbels later writing that Hitler was "wild with rage" at the selection. The judges were dismissed, and Hitler's photographer, Heinrich Hoffman, was drafted in to redevelop the exhibition at the last minute.

Dismayed at incurring the wrath of the Führer, Goebbels imagined a completely new kind of show to serve as a counter-exhibition to Great German Art. Desperate to regain Hitler's favour, Goebbels pitched an exhibition of degenerate art to highlight the disparity between 'traitorous' and 'patriotic' art. The idea went down a storm, and on 29 June Hitler officially gave his seal of approval.

The next day, Goebbels appointed Adolf Ziegler – Hitler's favourite painter and later known as the 'Master of German Pubic Hair' for his nude paintings – to head up a nationwide purge of the galleries, confiscating any works deemed degenerate. Ziegler was only too happy to comply, expelling thousands of works of art from the public view, over 650 of which would soon feature in the Degenerate Art exhibition. While works created by any artist deemed degenerate were rounded up, including works by Mondrian, Picasso and van Gogh, it was the work of German and Germany-based artists that were chosen for this very public humiliation.

In a matter of just two weeks, the exhibition was planned in its entirety. Held in Munich's Institute of Archaeology in the Hofgarten, the Degenerate Art exhibition was just round the corner from the House of Art, the home of



The catalogue cover of the 1937 Degenerate Art exhibition

TOO DEGENERATE TO EXHIBIT

Of all those showcased in the exhibition, one very vocal anti-Nazi artist was conspicuously absent…

Unashamedly anti-Nazi, John Heartfield was one of Hitler's biggest critics and at one point was fifth on the Gestapo's most-wanted list – so it's remarkable that this local dissenter didn't feature in the exhibition at all.

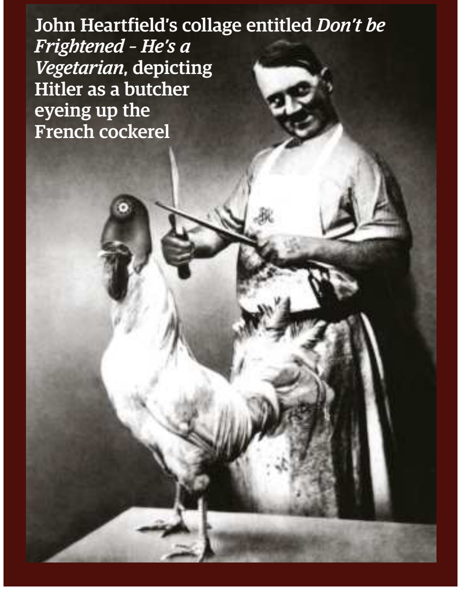
Born to German parents as Helmund Herzfeld in the late-19th century, he was called up to fight in World War I in September 1914.

Convinced at the futility of war, however, Herzfeld feigned a mental breakdown and was dismissed from military service. It was impossible, he believed, to fight in a war that he deemed the greatest insanity of all. As anti-British sentiment swept Germany, he chose to Anglicise his name and became known as John Heartfield.

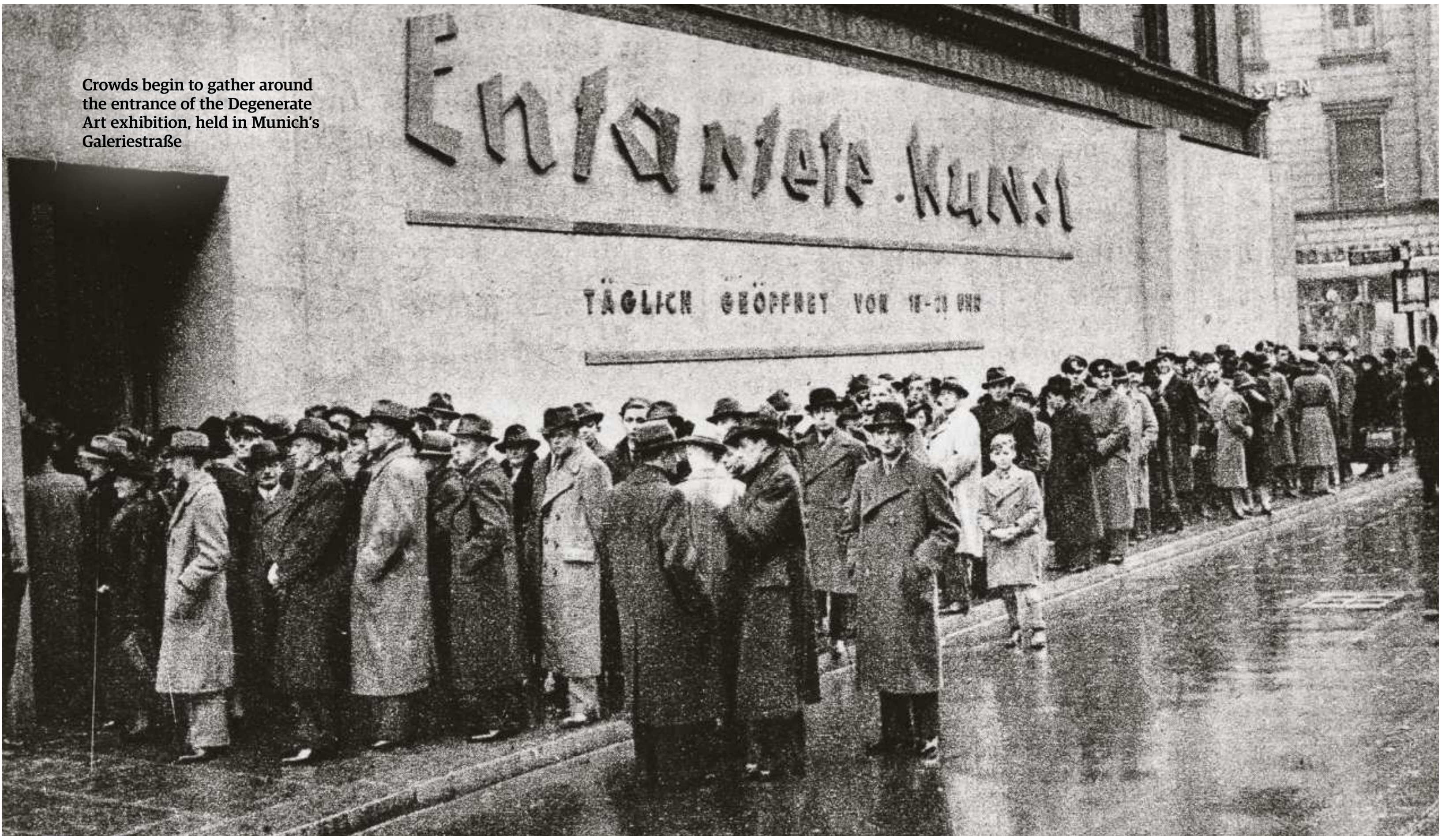
Upon moving to the capital, Heartfield became involved in the Berlin Dada scene, where he came to the realisation that creating art that wasn't anti-war was to be complicit in the government's propaganda campaign.

In response, he turned his back on traditional art and embraced photomontage, creating dozens of anti-war, anti-Hitler and anti-Nazi compositions that were published in several communist and anti-fascist magazines.

Heartfield was an integral part of the artistic resistance against the Nazis, but by using the press rather than the canvas to voice his disdain for the regime, he ensured that he wasn't an easy figure to attack. After all, Heartfield's press-published collages were impossible to round up and destroy; they could just as easily return with a vengeance.



John Heartfield's collage entitled *Don't be Frightened – He's a Vegetarian*, depicting Hitler as a butcher eyeing up the French cockerel



Crowds begin to gather around the entrance of the Degenerate Art exhibition, held in Munich's Galeriestraße

Hitler's Great German Art show. On 18 July 1937, the Great German Art exhibition opened with much fanfare – but the popularity of its counter-exhibition that opened the next day was unprecedented; over the course of its showing, the Degenerate Art show reeled in five times as many visitors as its upmarket companion.

Around 112 artists were exhibited in this hugely popular show, among them Wassily Kandinsky, Otto Dix, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Max Beckmann and Oskar Kokoschka, who was widely considered one of Austria's greatest artists of the era.

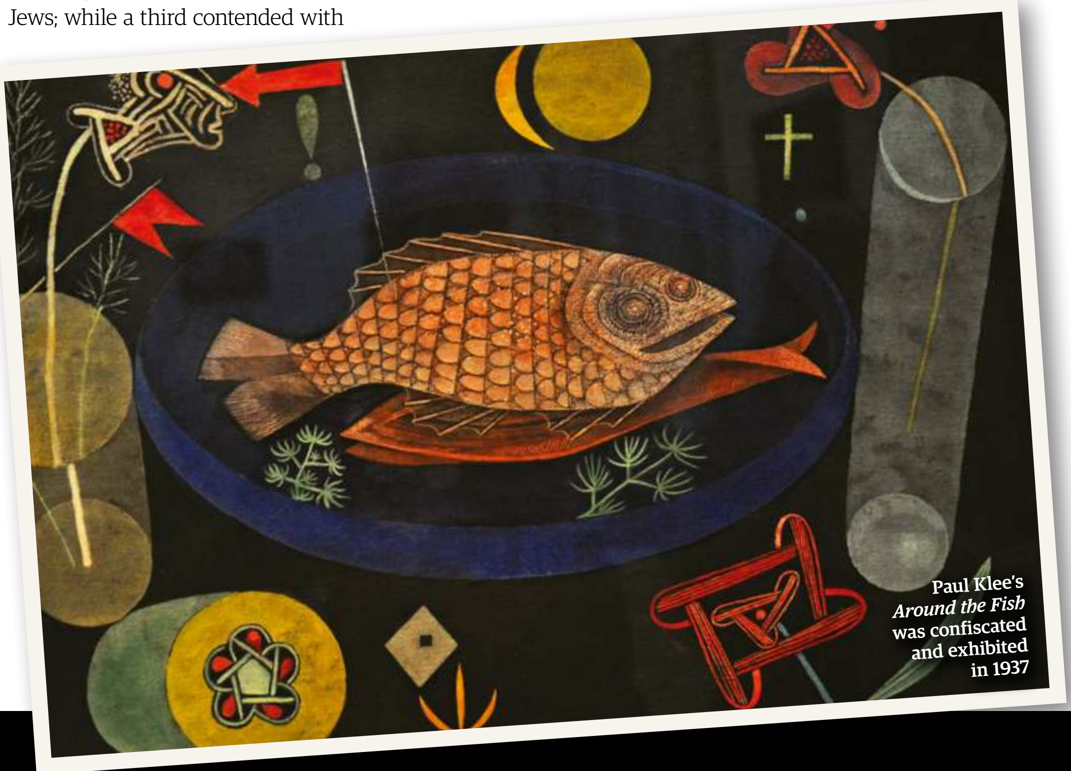
The art of these anti-Nazi artists, however, hung side by side with some unexpected companions. Emil Nolde, a proud and long-serving member of the Nazi Party, found his creations tarred as degenerate, and his paintings featured heavily throughout the exhibition. It was a catastrophe for the artist, who had long been supported, promoted and patronised by none other than Goebbels.

Artworks vied for space on the walls and floors of the exhibition space with tags attached to each work that listed the price that galleries had paid to possess them. But with the dark, tumultuous days of the Weimar Republic and hyperinflation not even a decade prior, the costs were wildly exaggerated. On these seemingly eye-watering tags, a line read, "Paid for with hard-earned tax-payers' money."

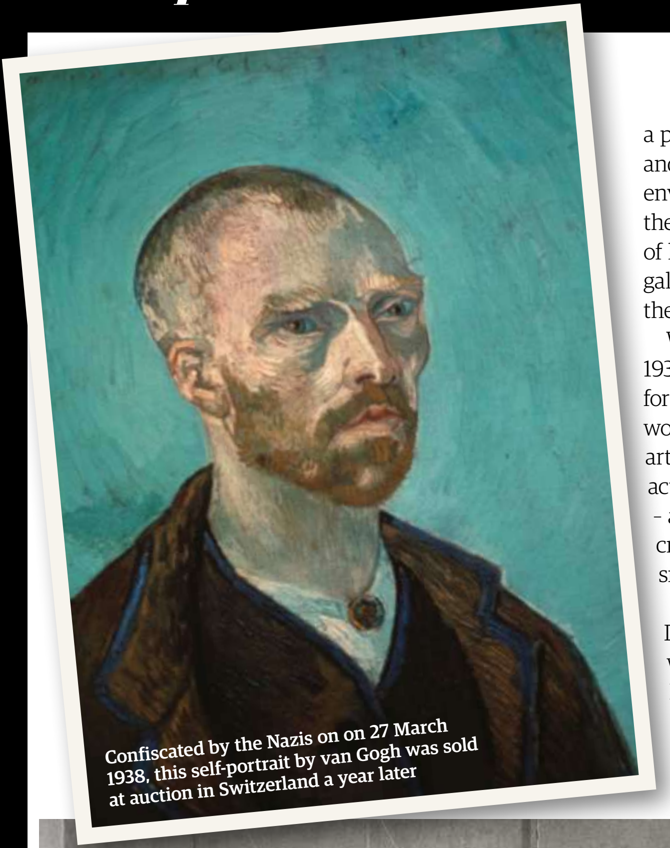
Surrounding the art, graffiti condemning the works was scrawled all over the walls: "Mockery of God", "An insult to German womanhood", "The ideal – cretin and whore".

Spread across several rooms, only sections of the exhibition were themed. The show opened with a room devoted to blasphemy and religious art; the second room dealt with Jews; while a third contended with the salt-of-the-earth people of Germany, including soldiers, women and farmers. The rest of the exhibition descended into unorganised chaos.

The Degenerate Art exhibition was a complete fiasco, an embarrassment to any curator. Paintings hung mere inches from one another and artworks were commonly misnamed or wrongly attributed. Rather than an exhibition, this was



Paul Klee's *Around the Fish* was confiscated and exhibited in 1937



Confiscated by the Nazis on on 27 March 1938, this self-portrait by van Gogh was sold at auction in Switzerland a year later

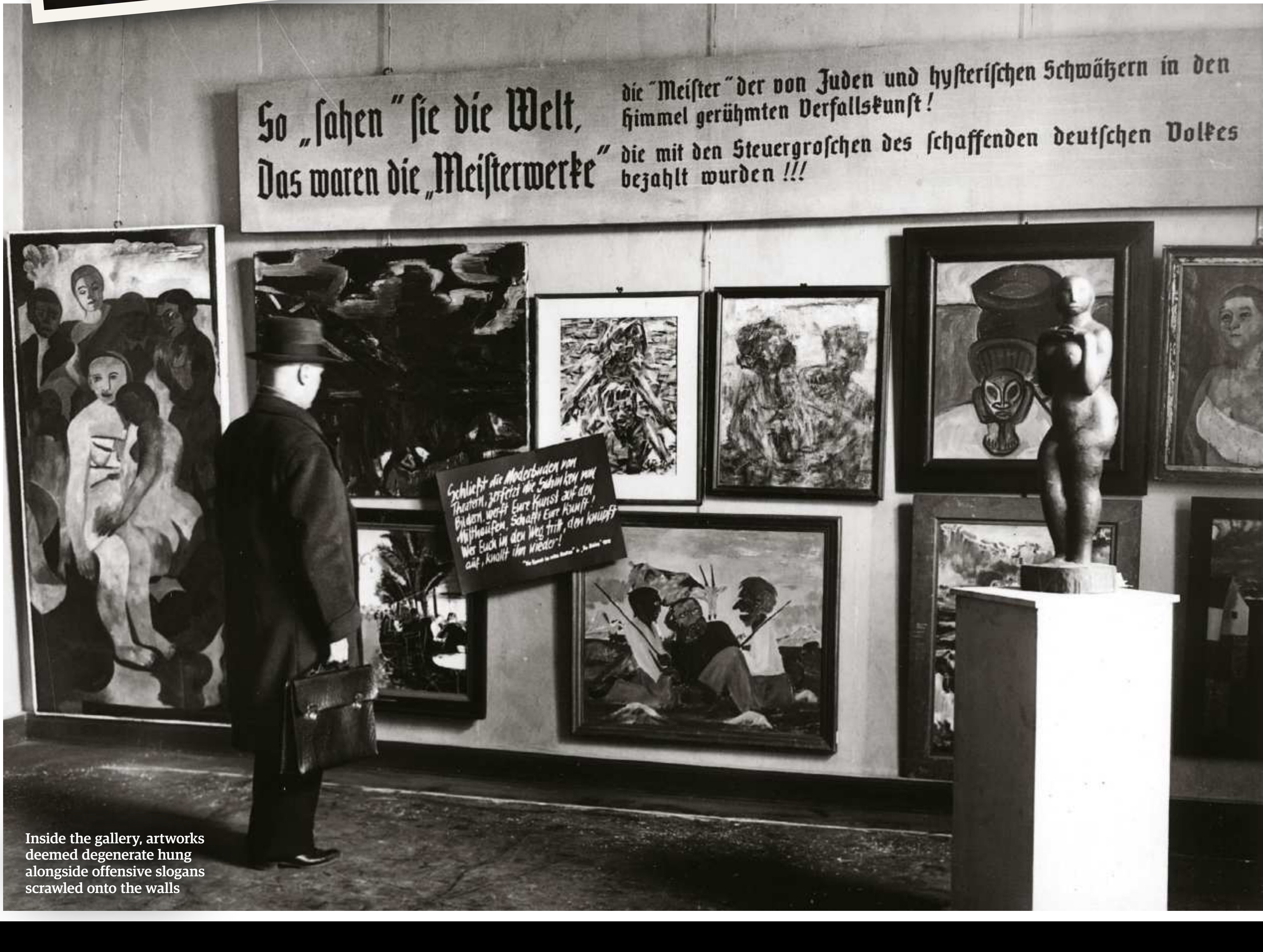
a propaganda spectacle designed to enrage and provoke; it was exactly what the Nazis envisioned. These creations, unworthy in their eyes of being called 'art', were unworthy of hanging on the walls of Germany's great gallery, and were unworthy of being seen by the German population.

When the exhibition opened on 19 July 1937, children were forbidden from attending for fear that they would be terrified - or worse, corrupted - by the obscenity of the art. For those who did attend, visitors were actively encouraged to interact with the art - actors were even hired to mingle with the crowd in order to provoke reactions. Some sneered, some shouted, some spat.

In the almost four-month run of the Degenerate Art exhibition, the show was considered one of the Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda's greatest successes. When it closed on 30 November, it had averaged around 20,000 visitors a day. With such exceptional engagement, the exhibition was taken on the road, visiting 11 other cities across Germany and Austria until it officially closed in 1941. More than just a popular exhibition, it proved to be one of the most powerful early Nazi propaganda campaigns, sending shockwaves not just throughout Germany, but across the world.

While many in Germany were glad to celebrate the 'worthy' art and culture of Nazi Germany, not all who visited the Degenerate Art exhibition were visiting for what the Nazis believed were the right reasons. Certainly, many visitors went to be shocked and to show their disdain for modern art, but for others the Degenerate Art exhibition was an opportunity to say farewell forever to some of these contemporary masterpieces.

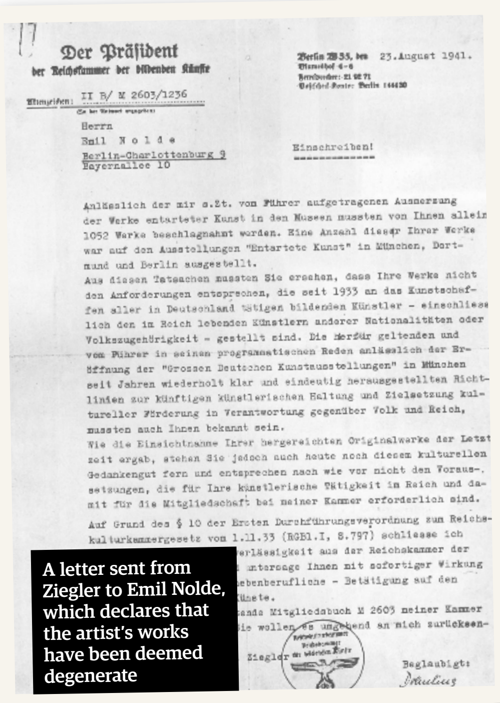
In the wake of the Degenerate Art exhibition, the collection was divided. Some works were destroyed, deemed worthless, while those considered valuable on an international market were flogged at auctions


So „ſahen" ſie die Welt,
Das waren die „Meiſterwerke"
die „Meiſter" der von Juden und hyſteriſchen Schwätzern in den Himmel gerühmten Verfallskunſt!
die mit den Steuergroſchen des ſchaffenden deutſchen Volkes bezahlt wurden !!!
Schließt die Moderbuden von Theatern, zerfetzt die Schinken von Bildern, werft Eure Kunst auf den Misthaufen. Schafft Eure Kunst! Wer Euch in den Weg tritt, den knüpft auf, knallt ihn nieder!

Inside the gallery, artworks deemed degenerate hung alongside offensive slogans scrawled onto the walls for cut-down prices, including works by van Gogh, Gauguin and Picasso. In the ultimate act of hypocrisy, many degenerate works of art that were looted and sold by the Nazis were acquired by the very men who sold them, bargain-hunters on the prowl for their next fortune. The rest ended up dispersed across the world or tragically lost.

But what of the artists whose reputations were ruined by the Degenerate Art exhibition? Oskar Kokoschka fled to Czechoslovakia, then later the UK, before settling in Switzerland where he died in 1980. Utterly ruined by his fall from grace, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner killed himself in 1938. Max Beckmann, like Kokoschka, escaped into exile. The once-proud Nazi Emil Nolde was banned from ever painting again by his one-time compatriots, so took up watercolours, a medium that didn't smell and was therefore easy to hide. All degenerate artists who worked in universities and art schools lost their positions.

Many of the artists who unwillingly starred in the Degenerate Art exhibition are today little more than just names on paper. With careers cut down in their prime, we'll never truly know what could have become of some of these creative geniuses.



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Der Präſident
der Reichskammer der bildenden Künſte

Berlin W35, den 23.August 1941.
Blumeshof 4-6
Fernsprecher: 21 92 71
Postscheck-Konto: Berlin 144430

Aktenzeichen: II B/ M 2603/1236
(In der Antwort anzugeben)

Herrn
Emil Nolde
Berlin-Charlottenburg 9
Bayernallee 10

Einschreiben!

Anlässlich der mir s.Zt. vom Führer aufgetragenen Ausmerzung der Werke entarteter Kunst in den Museen mussten von Ihnen allein 1052 Werke beschlagnahmt werden. Eine Anzahl dieser Ihrer Werke war auf den Ausstellungen "Entartete Kunst" in München, Dortmund und Berlin ausgestellt.

Aus diesen Tatsachen mussten Sie ersehen, dass Ihre Werke nicht den Anforderungen entsprechen, die seit 1933 an das Kunstschaffen aller in Deutschland tätigen bildenden Künstler – einschliesslich den im Reich lebenden Künstlern anderer Nationalitäten oder Volkszugehörigkeit – gestellt sind. Die hierfür geltenden und vom Führer in seinen programmatischen Reden anlässlich der Eröffnung der "Grossen Deutschen Kunstausstellungen" in München seit Jahren wiederholt klar und eindeutig herausgestellten Richtlinien zur künftigen künstlerischen Haltung und Zielsetzung kultureller Förderung in Verantwortung gegenüber Volk und Reich, mussten auch Ihnen bekannt sein.

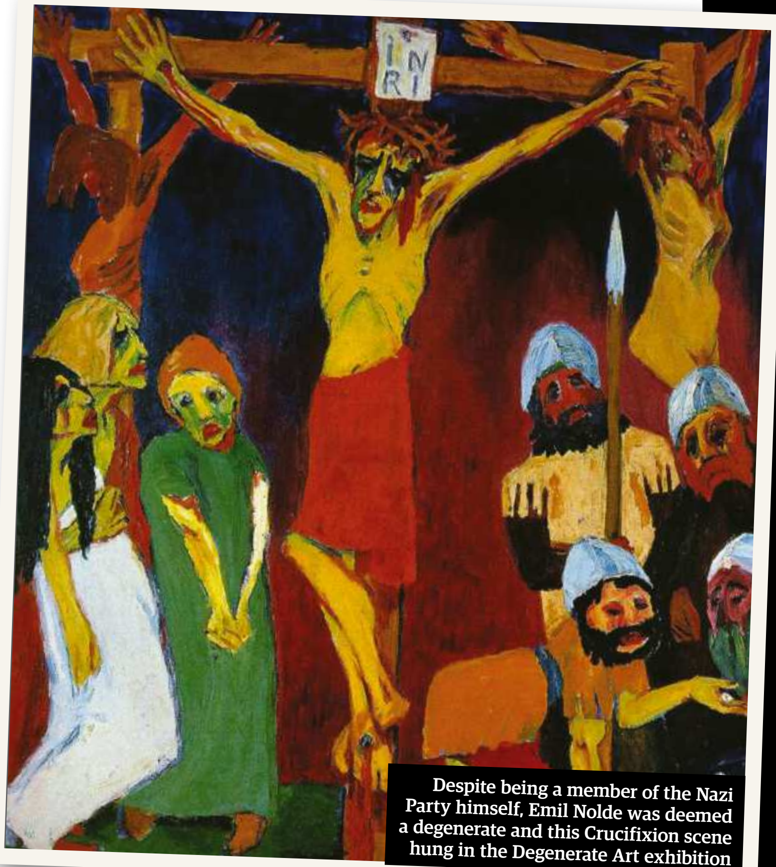
Wie die Einsichtnahme Ihrer hergereichten Originalwerke der Letztzeit ergab, stehen Sie jedoch auch heute noch diesem kulturellen Gedankengut fern und entsprechen nach wie vor nicht den Voraussetzungen, die für Ihre künstlerische Tätigkeit im Reich und damit für die Mitgliedschaft bei meiner Kammer erforderlich sind.

Auf Grund des § 10 der Ersten Durchführungsverordnung zum Reichskulturkammergesetz vom 1.11.33 (RGBl.I, S.797) schliesse ich
…erlässigkeit aus der Reichskammer der
… untersage Ihnen mit sofortiger Wirkung
…ebenberufliche – Betätigung auf den
…ünste.
…ande Mitgliedsbuch M 2603 meiner Kammer
…ie wollen es umgehend an mich zurücksen-

Ziegler

Beglaubigt:
Drechsler

A letter sent from Ziegler to Emil Nolde, which declares that the artist's works have been deemed degenerate



Despite being a member of the Nazi Party himself, Emil Nolde was deemed a degenerate and this Crucifixion scene hung in the Degenerate Art exhibition

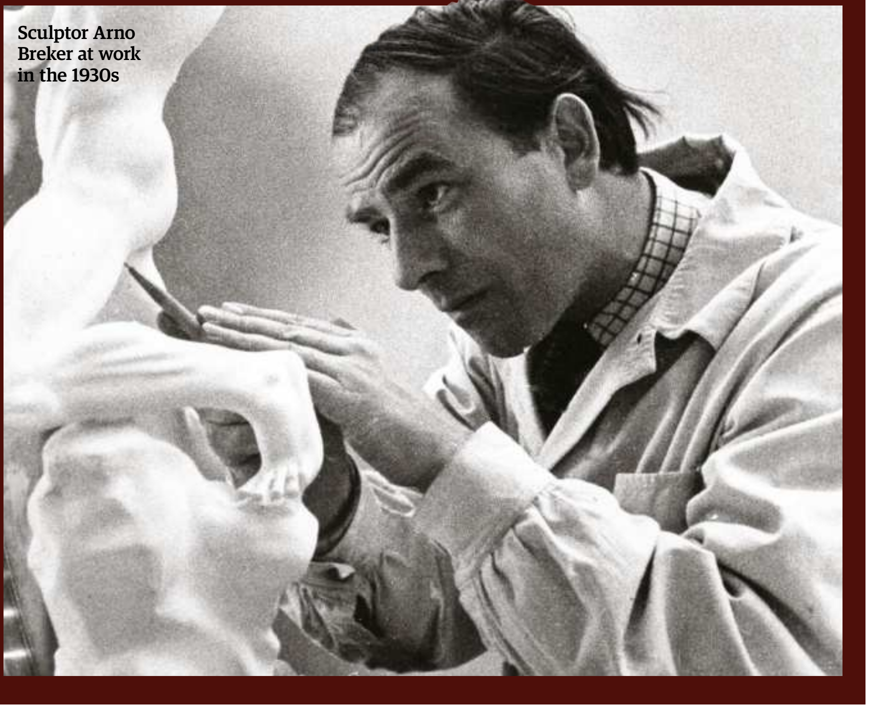
THE GOTTBEGNADETEN LIST

In a bid to build Nazi culture, a list of very special artists was drawn up

In the wake of the Degenerate Art exhibition Hitler and Goebbels were determined to see Nazi culture blossom and grow. In 1944 a record entitled the 'Gottbegnadeten' list – or 'God-gifted' list – was drawn up, featuring artists, musicians, actors, authors and other creatives that were considered national treasures. Among these prized figures were composer Richard Strauss, Nobel Prize-winning writer Gerhart Hauptmann and actor Heinz Rühmann. The honour meant that a letter was sent to the recipient, but is also guaranteed that the recipient was exempt from military mobilisation; these figures' contributions to culture were deemed more valuable than they could be in war.

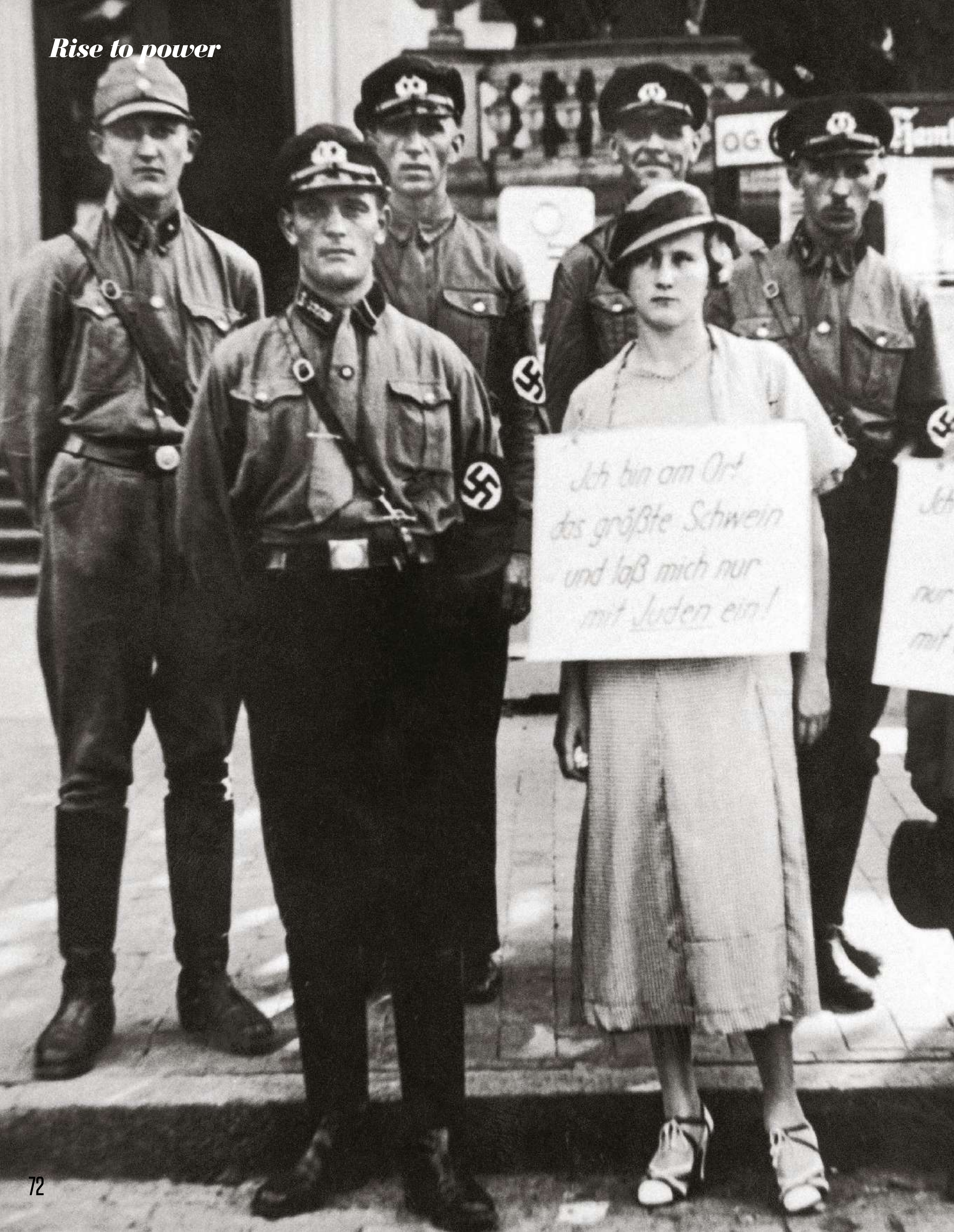
Arno Breker was one such artist who found himself on the God-gifted list. Championed as one of the greatest sculptors of the Third Reich, Breker had created sculptures for the 1936 Olympic Games, as well as creating two bronze sculptures to stand outside the Reich Chancellery. Exempt from military service, Breker was appointed the official sculptor of the Nazi Party and was gifted a studio, as well as almost 50 assistants.

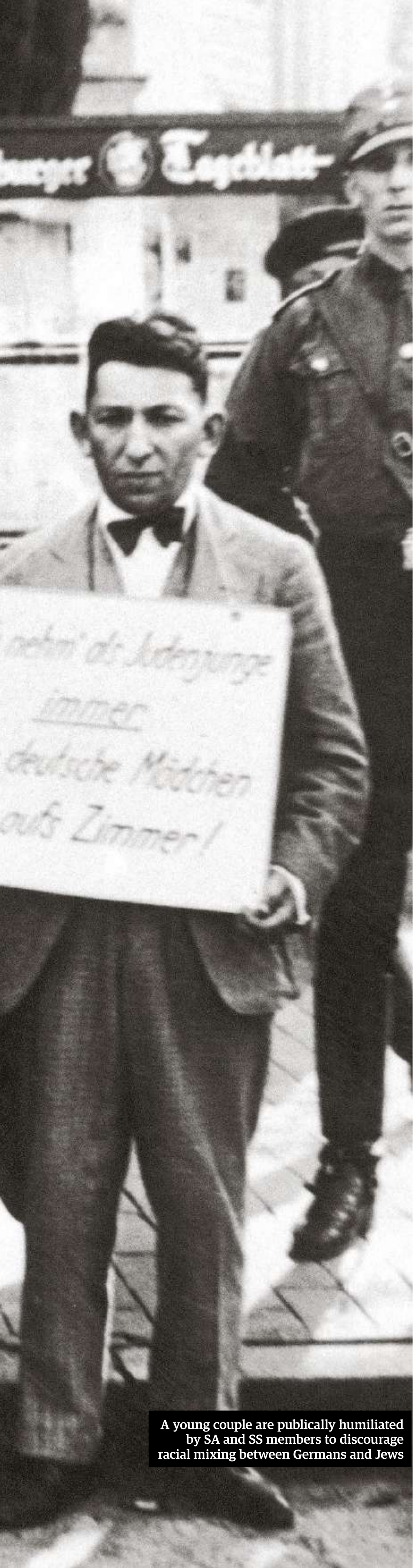
By the time the Third Reich crumbled, Breker's reputation had spread far and wide. Identified as a 'fellow traveller' of the Nazi Party than necessarily a Nazi himself, Breker was fined and left to continue his life in Düsseldorf. Over the next few decades he was commissioned by several wealthy and powerful patrons, including the King of Morocco. In 1985 a museum devoted to Breker's works opened in Nörvenich, Germany. He died in 1991 still a celebrated German artist, but many of his list-mates died in relative obscurity, their talent irrevocably tarnished by their relationships with the Nazis.



Sculptor Arno Breker at work in the 1930s

© Alamy, Getty Images, TopFoto


Ich bin am Ort
das größte Schwein
und laß mich nur
mit Juden ein!
Ich
nur
mit



A young couple are publically humiliated by SA and SS members to discourage racial mixing between Germans and Jews

THE ROAD TO GENOCIDE

Hitler's plans for the Jews evolved from random persecution to a prophecy for total annihilation...

Written by Will Lawrence

Adolf Hitler's pathological anti-Semitism found voice in his first political tract, published in 1919, and it ran through to his last testament, written in his Berlin bunker before his suicide in 1945. In between, it cost the lives of millions. Its origins, however, remain the subject of discussion. In *Mein Kampf*, he ascribes its inception to his 1908 move to Vienna, where he allegedly encountered one day, "An apparition in a black caftan and black hair locks." He went on to say that the man looked unlike his fellow countrymen and the more he saw of the Jews, the more he recognised them as a separate people.

"They became distinguished in my eyes," he wrote, "from the rest of humanity." *Mein Kampf* goes on to associate Jews with dirt and disease - a cruel prejudice that many soldiers would adopt during the occupation of Poland, which was home to thousands of rural Jews who lived in relative poverty.

Some historians doubt the veracity of Hitler's words - he may have invented his Viennese conversion when writing *Mein Kampf*. Whatever the truth, his anti-Semitism was certainly extant in the wake of Germany's defeat in the Great War of 1914 to 1918 - where he briefly served in the trenches - and the aftermath of which proved so disastrous for the Jewish population's relationship with its fellow Germans.

Many German Jews had fought in the war, with some 12,000 killed and thousands more wounded or maimed - and the statistics align with the percentage of Jews in the German populace - though many Germans incorrectly suspected that they had shirked their martial responsibilities. Germany's suing for peace in 1918 was framed by civil unrest, much of it inspired by Bolshevik uprisings to the east, and it did not escape notice that many leading Bolsheviks had Jewish origins. Trotsky, for one, was calling for revolution in Germany. The collapse of the German Empire, thought many nationalists, was inspired by Jewish subversion.

Certainly, this was Hitler's view and, following his election as Reich Chancellor on 30 January 1933, his ideology soon became manifested through direct action.

© Getty Images

During the election campaign, the Sturmabteilung – the brown-shirted Stormtroopers of the Nazi party, also known as the SA – had employed violence against their political opposition. From early March of that year, the SA began visiting violence upon the Jewish population of Germany.

At the first session of parliament, the Nazis forced through the Enabling Act, allowing the government to pass laws without the consent of the Reichstag or the President, and the SA's violence now carried Hitler's authority. The SA thugs were no longer operating outside the law. The violence did not go unnoticed in the international arena, and there were calls for a boycott of German goods. The regime responded by going on the attack; Hitler ordered a nationwide boycott of Jewish stores.

With Joseph Goebbels taking control of the newly established Ministry of Propaganda and Popular Enlightenment in March, indoctrination of the people began in earnest. The Ministry of Education, under party guidance, was purged of opposition and new textbooks were issued that promoted Nazi ideology, including the concept of racial purity. By October, Jews were barred from working in professions pertaining to culture, such as radio, film and music, as well as from holding editorships at the newspapers. The same year saw them barred from entering the legal profession, while doctors and dentists were forbidden from practising in the state sector.

Books by those perceived to be anti-German, including Jewish and Marxist authors, were soon piled high in burning pyres all across the country. During the 1800s, Heinrich Heine, a German poet of Jewish origin, had said that the burning of books would lead to the burning of people. His words were prophetic – in Nazi Germany it took just eight years.

Kristallnacht took its name from the shattered glass from shop windows that littered streets across Germany

> "Books by those perceived to be anti-German, including Jewish and Marxist authors, were soon piled high in burning pyres"

The physical violence meted out upon the Jewish population by the SA quietened during 1934, with the new regime more conscious of the international community casting disapproving glances its way. Intimidation was relentless, nevertheless, and the violence, while sporadic, was perennial. Still, many Jews thought the worst was over, and those who'd fled the violence of 1933 began trickling back home.

In fact, that aggression was just dormant. During the spring and summer of 1935 it erupted once more, spurred on by Nazi propaganda. Sexual relationships between Germans and Jews came under scrutiny, as did mixed-race marriages. By 1935 these were prohibited by law, courtesy of legislation announced at a Nazi rally in Nuremberg on 15 September. These Nuremberg Laws became the fulcrum of anti-Jewish legislation and restricted citizenship to those of 'pure' or 'kindred' blood; Jews, meanwhile, were to be subjects of the Reich with civil obligations, limited legal protection but no political rights.

The Laws created a number of dilemmas for Reich administrators by failing to define in certain terms who was actually to be deemed a Jew. In November, the bureaucracy settled upon two basic categories: a person was a full Jew if they had three or four Jewish grandparents, and a Mischlinge – or a person of mixed race – if they had one or two Jewish grandparents.

There was some respite for the Jewish population in 1936, as Hitler sought international acceptance with Berlin's hosting of the Olympic

Top Nazi Party members march in remembrance of 1923's Beer Hall Putsch, Munich, Germany, 9 November 1938

ENEMIES OF THE STATE

While Jews were the primary targets of Nazi racial and social policy, they were not its only victims

During the first half of 1933, the Nazi Party unleashed the Gestapo on its political enemies. By the spring of the following year, the SS leader Heinrich Himmler had begun the establishment of concentration camps in which they were to be held, and by mid-1936 he was appointed chief of the German police. The remainder of the left-wing resistance was soon crushed, allowing Himmler to concentrate efforts on preserving and refining the German racial and social organism.

Around 20,000 Jehovah's Witnesses, who refused to swear allegiance to the state or the Führer, were imprisoned, while social outcasts or those described as deviants – sex offenders, the intellectually feeble, sex workers and alcoholics – were subjected to sterilisation. Thieves and male homosexuals were carted off to the camps to be 're-educated'.

In 1939, shortly after the outbreak of war, the state introduced T-4, a programme of euthanasia to murder intellectually or physically disabled and emotionally disturbed Germans. The programme was eventually halted (though it was continued covertly) in the face of criticism from many Germans and members of the clergy. The methods employed, however, including gas chambers and mass crematoria, were soon put to use once again, this time against Jews and other racial enemies as the Nazis worked towards the Final Solution.

Alongside the Jews, the other primary racial targets were black Germans, those who were born to African soldiers and German mothers during the Allied occupation of the Rhineland, as well as the Roma and Sinti people, pejoratively known as 'gypsies'. There were up to 26,000 resident in Germany, and the Nuremberg Laws targeted them because of their 'alien blood'. As the war unfolded, many were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau in Poland.

Games. A boycott, provoked by anti-Semitic violence, would have severely damaged the Reich's standing, though outside the major cities, in Germany's vast rural tracts, the quality of Jewish life continued to diminish. Thousands of disillusioned Jews, who had once regarded themselves as German, flooded into the cities.

In the wake of the Olympics, Hitler launched his Four Year Plan. He had already sent troops into the Rhineland, which had been deemed a demilitarised zone by the Treaty of Versailles, and now he prepared his nation for further imperial expansion.

The Plan also laid out ideological goals and identified the perceived danger of Bolshevism in the East. For Hitler and the Nazis, the Jews were inextricably linked to this threat. Hence Hitler was outlining his plan to bring Bolshevism and, by association, international Jewry to its knees. Germany would enhance its military. He would fight the Jews. They had cost Germany victory in the Great War, he said, and they'd conquered Russia. Germany must strike back.

In January 1937, proposals were drawn up for a campaign designed to force the Jewish population out of Germany by attacking its economic base. If the Jews could not survive economically, they would emigrate, and Germany would try to steer them towards poor, underdeveloped areas where they would be unable to regroup and pose a future threat to the Reich.

The directives empowered municipal offices, the Gestapo and local Nazi officials to intimidate Jewish businesses, in some cases forcing their closure. The policy of 'Aryanisation' allowed the transfer of commercial enterprises from Jewish ownership to German for a fraction of the true value. As more and more fled the country, others responded in desperation by taking their own lives. "The Jews in Germany entered 1938 with a feeling of dread and growing helplessness," writes one leading historian.

In truth, the year unfolded in a manner even more frightful than they had feared. In February 1938, Hitler demanded self-determination for all Germans in Austria and Czechoslovakia and, shortly after, Austrian Nazis rioted and invited Hitler to invade, which he did in March. The annexation of Austria was known as Anschluss. There were terrible repercussions against Vienna's Jews, many of whom had supported the deposed chancellor or the pre-existing Austrian republic. Shops were ransacked or, at the very least, subjected to crippling boycotts, while the local Nazis and members of the Schutzstaffel, or SS, forced Jews into menial and humiliating tasks.

The SS officer Adolf Eichmann was posted to Vienna to encourage and oversee the emigration of the Jewish population and he proved highly capable. As a consequence, Nazi leaders in Germany's great cities, hearing of the violence in Vienna and Eichmann's success, hoped they too could expedite the emigration of their Jewish populations. Violence against German Jews escalated once more, with attacks aimed specifically at religious sites, such as synagogues and cemeteries.

Those same leaders found further opportunity when, in April 1938, a decree was passed to meet the demands of the Four Year Plan, pushing for the registration and then the potential enforced sale of Jewish businesses. This boosted Nazi coffers while also adding further economic pressure on the beleaguered Jewish population. When Hitler came to power there were around 50,000 Jewish businesses in Germany. By July 1938 there were only around 9,000. In June the Nazis demolished the main synagogue in Munich. It was the first that they totally destroyed. It would by no means be the last.

During October 1938, Hitler marched into the Sudetenland (the northern, southern, and western areas of former Czechoslovakia, which were inhabited by many Sudeten Germans). The

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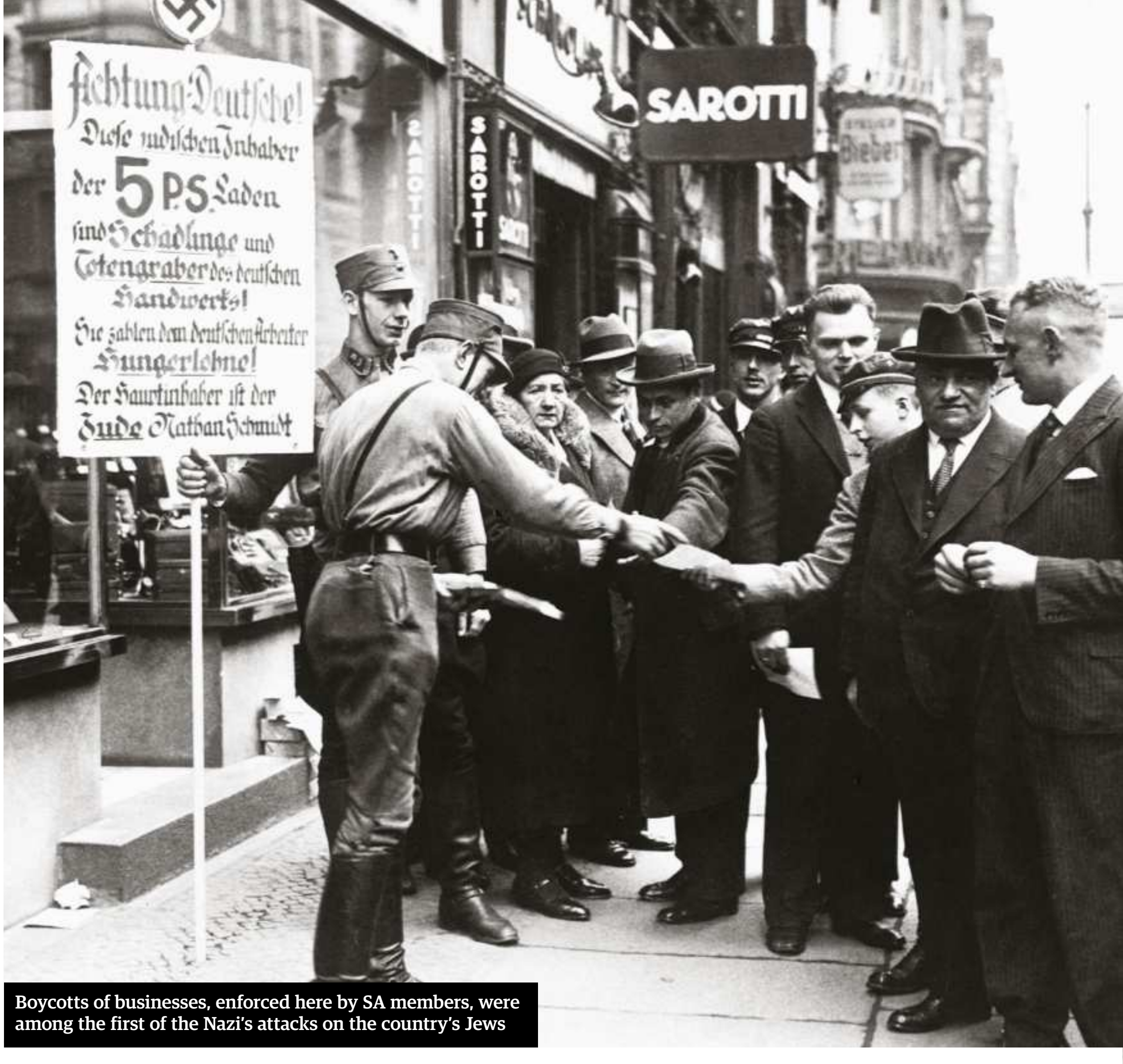


Boycotts of businesses, enforced here by SA members, were among the first of the Nazi's attacks on the country's Jews

> "The singular action of one disaffected man was painted as a tangible proof that Jews were seeking to spark war"

burgeoning imperialism, both here and through Anschluss, bolstered the confidence of the top men in the SS, the likes of Heinrich Himmler and Reinhard Heydrich, who quickly sought to boost their own influence and power.

Already by August 1938, Hitler had agreed to Himmler's wish for an armed extension of the SS, a move that would bring yet more misery down upon Jews in both the East and the West. The SS leaders regarded their elite force as the future masters of a German Empire and they were dedicated to the destruction of those they perceived as ideological adversaries, which, according to Himmler, comprised, "Jewry, freemasonry, Marxism and the churches of the world." With Hitler keen to keep his own association with anti-Semitic behaviour out of the public eye at this time, those 'working towards the Führer' executed Nazi ideology - members of the SS, for example, were keen to execute Hitler's bidding without the need for direct orders.

For all the heightened violence and anti-Semitic Nazi Party activity during 1938, the regime's leadership was still frustrated by what it perceived as sluggish emigration numbers, despite the rounding up and deportation of some 18,000 Polish Jews in October 1938.

Since 1937, Eichmann had suggested that pogroms - targeted ethnic cleansing - should be launched against the Jews. What the Nazis really needed was an excuse, something that they could use to justify ramped-up violence against their primary target, something that they could use to justify the action to conservatives at home and to the disapproving international community overseas. They got what they wanted on 7 November 1938.

A young Polish Jew, Herschel Grynszpan, shot the German third legation secretary in Paris. Seeking revenge for the enforced deportation of his family, he had hoped to shoot the German Ambassador but opened fire on the first official that he saw. This unfortunate secretary, Ernst vom Rath, succumbed to his wounds just as Nazis across Germany were gathered to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the ill-fated Munich Beer Hall Putsch of 1923, which saw Hitler and his ambitious Nazi Party bid to overrun and replace the Weimar government.

The morning after Rath's shooting, on 8 November, the Nazi press, directed by Goebbels, was saturated with vicious anti-Jewish sentiment designed to stir up tensions. The singular action of one disaffected man was painted as a tangible proof that Jews were seeking to spark war between Germany and France. When receiving reports of Rath's death on the afternoon of 9 November, Hitler, Goebbels and Hermann Göring also heard that the news had ignited a wave of anti-Semitic violence in the town of Dessau, with shops smashed and the synagogue burned.

Hitler had dinner among a large congregation of Nazi officials, SA members and party men at the Old Town Hall in Munich to celebrate the heroes of the Beer Hall Putsch but departed early, leaving Goebbels to address the crowd. The Minister for Propaganda delivered a short but highly inflammatory speech, reporting Rath's death and the spontaneous violence that had erupted elsewhere in Germany. He encouraged further 'demonstrations' against the Jews, suggesting that this too should appear spontaneous.

The gathered throng, many of whom were full of drink, proved a receptive audience and were

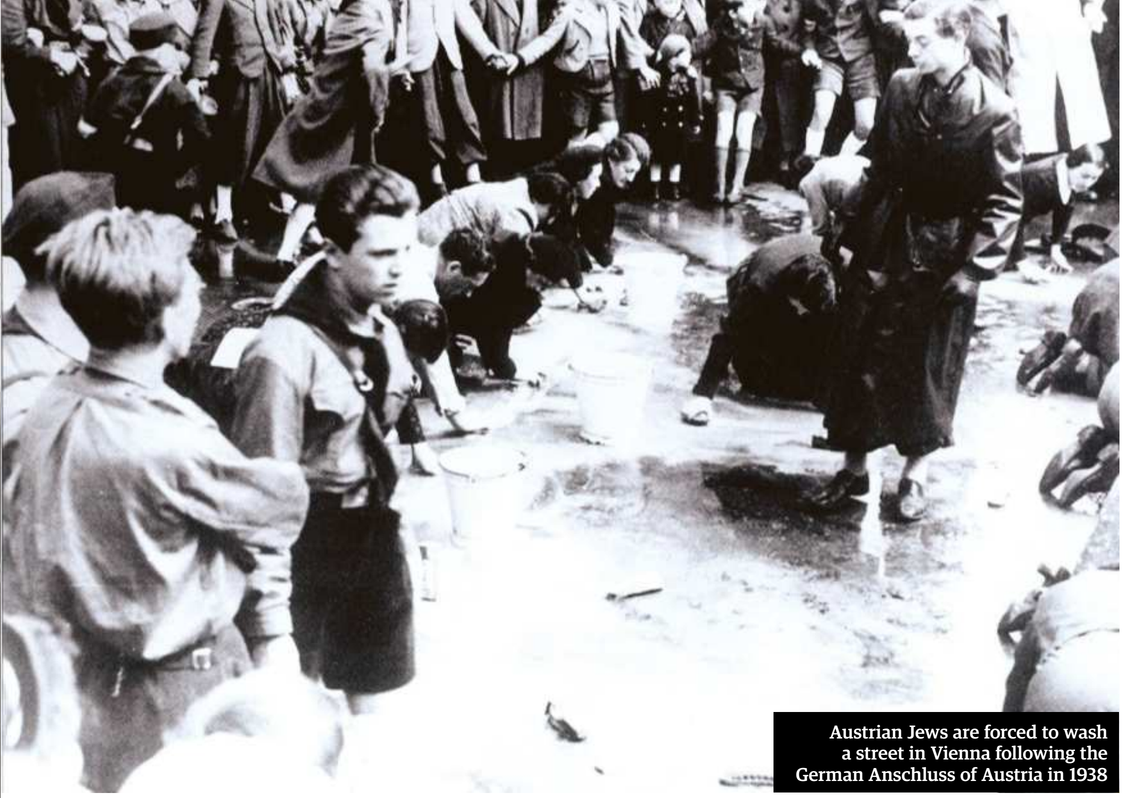
POLAND AND THE GHETTOS

The Nazi state carried its terror into new territories, and the Jews in particular were the biggest victims

Hitler believed in Lebensraum, a colonial policy advocating a land grab in Poland and further east in a bid to resettle citizens. He invaded in September 1939 and the country became what one leading historian terms "a laboratory for experiments in brutality". The Poles were considered an inferior race and many among their intellectual leaders, journalists, professors and clergymen were killed in the opening months of the occupation. In a bid to suppress feelings of national identity, the authorities forbade activities that might promote communal ties. Poles were denied education. They were terrorised by the occupying forces, beaten and abused. They were to be treated as serfs once the Reich had settled its colonialists.

At the time of the invasion, around ten per cent of the Polish population was Jewish, and the Orthodox Jews in particular were subjected to extreme degradation. In a bid to contain the Jewish populace, and to profit from the confiscation of its chattels, the Nazis developed ghettoisation. In the autumn of 1940 Warsaw stood as the largest of Poland's 400 ghettos and the Jews were herded into an area containing 200,000 persons per square mile. As you'd expect, disease and malnutrition were rife.

Where this was not possible, the Jews were taken to labour camps and forced to work on survival rations. It is estimated that over half a million Jews died in the ghettos and work camps across 1939-40. When Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, many work camps became death camps as the Nazis initiated the systematic killing of Jews.



Austrian Jews are forced to wash a street in Vienna following the German Anschluss of Austria in 1938

The Eberswalde synagogue in Berlin, Germany burns during the anti-Semitic attacks of Kristallnacht

soon in contact with their organisations across the country, although the SS were ordered to stand down – random violence did not fit their remit – and if they acted they were to wear civilian uniforms.

The pogrom that followed over the night of 9–10 November became known as Kristallnacht (Crystal Night, or Night of Broken Glass), courtesy of the deluge of shattered glass that littered the streets as Jewish business were attacked. That night, around 100 synagogues were demolished, 8,000 shops were struck and around 100 Jews were killed. Heydrich estimated that the damage inflicted ran to several hundred million marks.

The human misery of the victims, however, writes one of Hitler's preeminent biographers, "was incalculable". Terrible beatings and maltreatment were visited on men and women, old folk and children; suicide was rife that night. The attacks were chaotic and disorganised, humiliating and brutal. There was sexual violence and degradation. In the days following, some 30,000 Jewish men were rounded up and sent to the concentration camps at Sachsenhausen, Buchenwald and Dachau. These had been built to house political prisoners and were not designed for the sudden influx of thousands of new inmates; conditions were appalling, the beatings were pitiless.

On 12 November, Göring convened a meeting of 100 senior party officials at the Air Ministry to assess the economic impact of the pogrom. Insurance companies were ordered to pay out damages, though this was to be collected by the Reich, not by the Jews, and the Jews themselves were ordered to pay a billion marks before their total exclusion from the economy on 1 January 1939. Given such draconian measures and the ferocity of Kristallnacht, thousands of Jews started the emigration process. Some 100,000 left between the pogrom and the outbreak of war. Of the unfortunates that remained many were conscripted for forced labour; around 15,000 by May 1939.

Though accidental and opportunist, the November pogrom – and the relish with which many Germans participated in its execution – proved the efficacy of Nazi propaganda. The Jews had been dehumanised. In the aftermath of its haphazard, chaotic viciousness, the Nazi regime then began a more coherent and organised persecution campaign. With Kristallnacht, the Nazis had taken a pivotal, fateful step down the road to genocide.

In his speech to the Reichstag on 30 January 1939, celebrating his sixth year in office, Hitler publicly associated the destruction of the Jews with the advent of forthcoming conflict. If the Jewry of international finance should plunge the world into another war, he declared, "the result will be not the Bolshevization of the Earth and thereby the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe." As war unfolded, Hitler made this annihilation a vital tenet of his policy. It was not long before the Holocaust began.

© Getty Images

The Edelweiss Pirates youth group opposed Hitler and his policies and was formed in response to the Hitler Youth

GERMAN OPPOSITION TO HITLER

Not everyone supported Hitler. A host of brave citizens risked their lives opposing the regime

Written by Will Lawrence

Pivotal to Nazi ideology, its propaganda and its election manifesto was the promise to build a new Germany, a phoenix rising in defiant glory from the ashes of a decrepit and complicit Weimar Republic. At the centre of this ideology stood the concept of national community. Those regarded as alien were to be suffocated, punished or removed. Even before the Nazis launched attacks against German Jews, criminals, 'gypsies' and others, their paramilitary groups – the SA and the SS – unleashed a reign of terror on their political rivals.

The main opposition to the new regime came from the left, with communists, trade unions and the Social Democrats all competing with the Nazis both during the Weimar Republic and in the wake of the Nazis' rise to power. The communists, in particular, were vocal opponents, printing leaflets and newspapers criticising the regime.

The reaction, just weeks after the Nazis took power, in 1933, was swift and brutal. Opponents were - in their tens of thousands - detained, tortured and sent to concentration camps.

Among the most notable groups were Beginning Anew, the Socialist Front, the Saefkow group and the International Socialist Fighting League. Often regarded as the most important was the Red Orchestra, as it was dubbed by the Gestapo, led by Luftwaffe lieutenant Harro Schulze-Boysen along with Arvid and Mildred Harnack. The group managed to smuggle people out of Germany, as well as keeping Hitler's enemies informed of Nazi atrocities. Its leaders were executed in 1942.

Another mellifluously named outfit was the White Rose group, which bloomed out of a youth movement from the Weimar years. If they felt any love for National Socialism, it quickly ebbed away once the new regime's violence, racism and autocratic methods became apparent. Its members were especially appalled by the behaviour of German forces during the campaign in the East.

Led by students, they advocated nonviolent protest, printing thousands upon thousands of leaflets condemning anti-Semitism and the murders of the Polish elite. They also pilloried what they considered the apathy of their own citizenry, and hoped their media campaigns would provoke others into action and incite a national uprising. After Stalingrad, they launched a graffiti campaign and - though their leaders were eventually caught and executed - their leaflets were widely disseminated; the RAF dropped thousands of them across Germany during 1943.

Another youth group was the Edelweiss Pirates, who formed in opposition to the Hitler Youth, whom they regularly attacked. At first, the regime took a relatively soft stance, hoping to re-educate the youthful members. Yet in the wake of the July 1944 attempt on Hitler's life, Himmler ordered a crackdown - 13 of its leaders were hanged.

© Getty Images

SA leader Ernst Röhm was killed during Hitler's infamous purge known as the Night of the Long Knives

> "The reaction was swift and brutal – within weeks, tens of thousands were detained, tortured and sent to concentration camps"

Still, for all their efforts, most opposition groups struggled to make a significant impact. The left-wing collectives saw their leaders either incarcerated or opting for a life in exile. The Gestapo had made these groups their chief targets and informers, along with old adversaries with scores to settle, soon undermined them. Many sympathisers were deterred from overt action.

Indeed, even fellow Nazis were not safe if their intentions or aspirations deviated from those advocated by Hitler and his closest confidantes. The paramilitary SA, for example, had never fully accepted its subservience to the party's political wing. When, during the early months of 1934, its chief, Ernst Röhm, riled Hitler by boosting his organisation's military faculties – by recruiting more men (the SA's ranks swelled to 4.5 million), ordering arms from overseas and conducting large-scale parades – his fate was set.

From 30 June to 2 July 1934, Hermann Göring and Heinrich Himmler instigated Operation Hummingbird, or the Night of the Long Knives as it became known, a bloody purge that witnessed the murder of Röhm, a host of his allies, and other more conservative politicians who had expressed concerns over the party's increasingly radical agenda. It is thought that up to 200 might have died. Hitler claimed he was suppressing an attempted coup d'état.

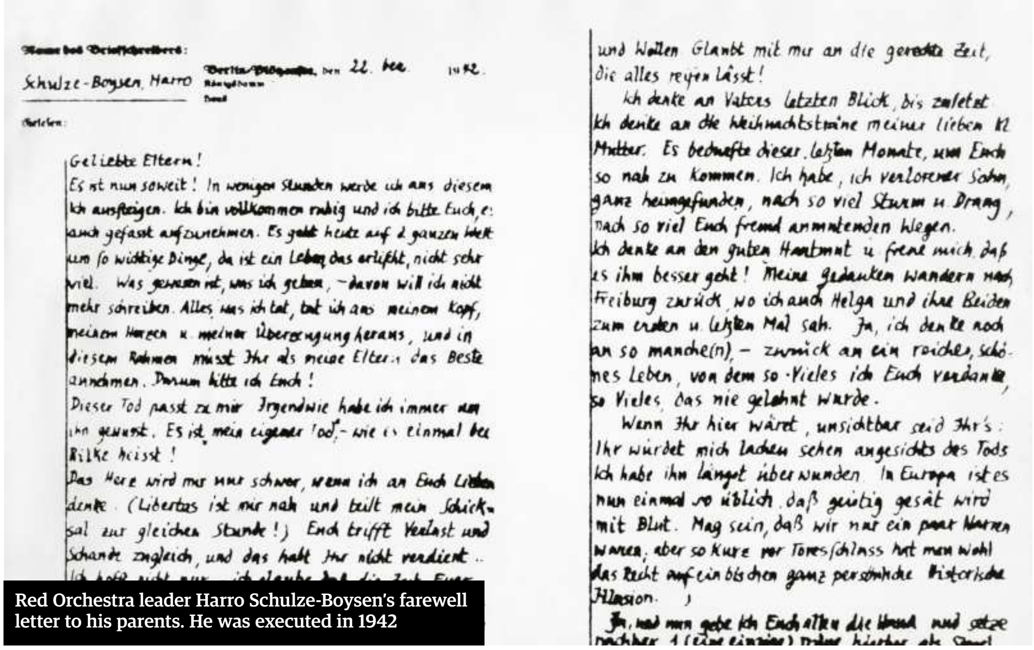
Though Röhm did not actually contest Hitler's political and military ambitions, the Gestapo proved so effective at crushing political opposition that the most organised and potentially effective opposition did begin to devolve onto officers and officials who were, for the most part, above suspicion.

The first of these groups had supported Nazi policy, having regarded the National Socialists as saviours delivering the country from the threat of Bolshevism. Their ardour began to wane, however, as Hitler absorbed ever more control from the state bureaucracy and embarked on the path to war.

Chief among these men were the army chief of staff, General Ludwig Beck, who quit his post in protest of Hitler's confrontation with Britain and France over his plans for Czechoslovakia; the former mayor of Leipzig, Carl Goerdeler; Adam von Trott in the foreign ministry; and Hans Oster, a senior intelligence officer.

These influential figures cautioned the Western powers about Hitler's intent. Yet their warnings went unheeded, so they hatched a plan to arrest Hitler before he steered Germany into a war. Oster spearheaded the plot and drew in senior figures such as Colonel General Franz Halder, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, and Lieutenant General Erwin von Witzleben, who planned to storm the Reich Chancellery, seize control of the government, and arrest or kill Hitler. Wilhelm II would be restored.

Unfortunately for the plotters, the Munich agreement of September 1938 - at which Britain and France accepted the German annexation of the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia - scotched their plans. The prospect of all-out war, which they feared, seemed to recede.

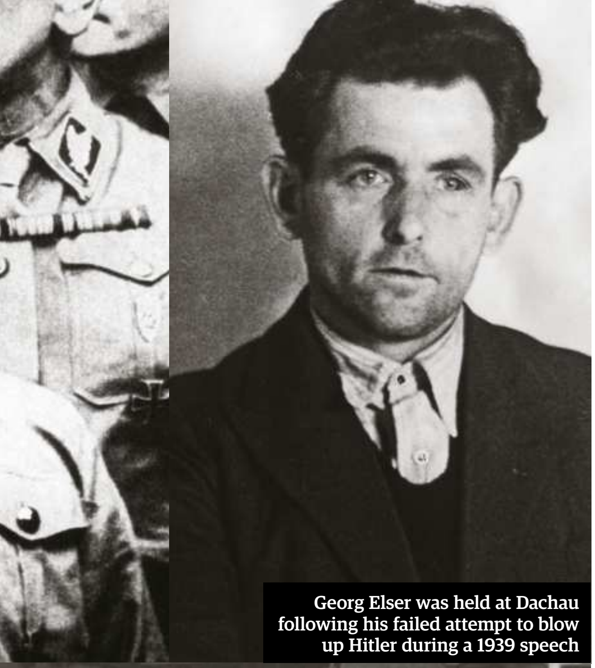


Name des Briefschreibers:
Schulze-Boysen, Harro
Berlin-Plötzensee, den 22. Dez. 1942

Geliebte Eltern!
Es ist nun soweit! In wenigen Stunden werde ich aus diesem Ich aussteigen. Ich bin vollkommen ruhig und ich bitte Euch, es auch gefasst aufzunehmen. Es geht heute auf d. ganzen Welt um so wichtige Dinge, da ist ein Leben, das erlischt, nicht sehr viel. Was gewesen ist, was ich getan, – davon will ich nicht mehr schreiben. Alles, was ich tat, tat ich aus meinem Kopf, meinem Herzen u. meiner Überzeugung heraus, und in diesem Rahmen müsst Ihr als meine Eltern das Beste annehmen. Darum bitte ich Euch!
Dieser Tod passt zu mir. Irgendwie habe ich immer um ihn gewusst. Es ist mein eigener Tod, – wie es einmal bei Rilke heisst!
Das Herz wird mir nur schwer, wenn ich an Euch Lieben denke. (Libertas ist mir nah und teilt mein Schicksal zur gleichen Stunde!) Euch trifft Verlust und Schande zugleich, und das habt Ihr nicht verdient.

und Wollen. Glaubt mit mir an die gerechte Zeit, die alles reifen lässt!
Ich denke an Vaters letzten Blick, bis zuletzt. Ich denke an die Weihnachtstränen meiner lieben kl. Mutter. Es bedurfte dieser letzten Monate, um Euch so nah zu kommen. Ich habe, ich verlorener Sohn, ganz heimgefunden, nach so viel Sturm u. Drang, nach so viel Euch fremd anmutenden Wegen.
Ich denke an den guten Hartmut u. freue mich, daß es ihm besser geht! Meine Gedanken wandern nach Freiburg zurück, wo ich auch Helga und ihre Beiden zum ersten u. letzten Mal sah. Ja, ich denke noch an so manche(n), – zurück an ein reiches, schönes Leben, von dem so Vieles ich Euch verdanke, so Vieles, das nie gelohnt wurde.
Wenn Ihr hier wäret, unsichtbar seid Ihr's: Ihr würdet mich lachen sehen angesichts des Tods. Ich habe ihn längst überwunden. In Europa ist es nun einmal so üblich, daß geistig gesät wird mit Blut. Mag sein, daß wir nur ein paar Narren waren; aber so kurz vor Toresschluss hat man wohl das Recht auf ein bisschen ganz persönliche historische Illusion.
Ja, und nun gebe ich Euch allen die Hand und setze

Red Orchestra leader Harro Schulze-Boysen's farewell letter to his parents. He was executed in 1942



Georg Elser was held at Dachau following his failed attempt to blow up Hitler during a 1939 speech

Hermann Göring (in white) and other officers survey the damage to the Wolf's Lair HQ after the July 1944 attempt on Hitler's life

General Field Marshal Erwin von Witzleben was designated to become commander-in-chief of the Wehrmacht in the wake of a successful July Plot

OPERATION VALKYRIE

On 20 July 1944, a group of military leaders tried to assassinate Hitler in a bid to sue for a favourable peace

Code-named Valkyrie, plans for the most famous attempt on Hitler's life were formulated during 1943 by a group of military staff under the auspices of Ludwig Beck, Henning von Tresckow, Friedrich Olbricht and Claus von Stauffenberg. Hitler's increasing paranoia, however, made him a difficult target and it was not until the summer of 1944 that they launched their attack.

On 20 July, Stauffenberg placed a bomb in a briefcase and set it down in a room at the Wolf's Lair field headquarters at Rastenburg where Hitler was due to meet officers and aides. Unknown to Stauffenberg, one officer unwittingly moved the bomb to the other side of the room – when it exploded, killing four people, Hitler survived with only minor injuries.

Stauffenberg witnessed the explosion and, presuming Hitler had died in the blast, flew to Berlin to join the other conspirators. They had not acted swiftly enough in the aftermath, however, and failed to execute the next stage of the plan – seizing the Supreme Command Headquarters.

© Getty

Roland Freisler (seated left) oversaw a show trial for the conspirators

General Friedrich Fromm who had supported the plan then backtracked and tried to prove his allegiance by arresting Stauffenberg, Olbricht and Beck. They were either shot or, in Beck's case, invited to commit suicide. The fate of the other conspirators was far worse.

Those arrested by the Gestapo were subjected to terrible torture before being hauled before the fearsome Nazi judge Roland Freisler for a show trial at the People's Court. Many were then taken to Plötzensee Prison in Berlin where they were hanged, strung up on hooks, and their executions filmed for Hitler's enjoyment. Whether he watched the macabre film is unknown, but the deaths of around 200 conspirators was, in the words of one historian, "Hitler's last triumph."

When the conflict they dreaded did erupt, following the invasion of Poland, the conspirators became appalled by the barbarism of their occupying forces. Hence, when they heard of an attempt on Hitler's life in the Bürgerbräukeller, on the evening of 8 November 1939, they thought it might have been initiated by one of their own.

As it transpired, Georg Elser, a joiner from Königsbronn, launched the assassination effort unaided, targeting Hitler with a bomb as he gave his annual speech in commemoration of the Beer Hall Putsch. Hitler left the auditorium earlier than expected and while the bomb detonated, killing eight and injuring 62 others, its main target survived. Elser was held at Dachau before his execution less than a month before Germany's surrender in 1945.

Resistance from within

The group continued to formulate plans for Hitler's removal throughout the war and, as their circle widened, they came into contact with another of the most significant domestic resistance groups, the Kreisau Circle, led by Helmuth James von Moltke and named after the estate where they met.

With membership drawn from a variety of backgrounds, though led by Prussian aristocrats and demonstrating a strong moral and religious orientation, the Kreisau Circle were pacifists who, initially, objected to the idea of assassination. They believed that the Third Reich would not last – a treasonous assumption in Nazi Germany – and concentrated their efforts on debating their country's social and political future in a free world.

The Circle's reprehension of the regime's increasing brutality, however, eventually led it to accept a plot to remove Hitler by violent means and the group became embroiled in the July Plot of 1944, led by Lieutenant Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg. The group had already started to falter after the Gestapo pounced on Moltke in January 1944 and it fizzled out when the remainder of its most senior members were arrested later that year.

Like many other dissenters among the German military, Stauffenberg, a Swabian aristocrat, had supported the new regime. He objected to its anti-Semitism and disapproved of Hitler's warmongering, though he served in Poland and approved of German plans for the country's colonisation. He also enthused about the success of the blitzkrieg in the West.

Though he held the Poles in low regard, as did many Germans, he became increasingly concerned with military brutality in the East, the final straw coming when he was presented with irrefutable evidence of SS-led massacres of Ukrainian Jews. He decided he must try to kill Hitler.

While serving with the 10th Panzer Division in North Africa, he was badly wounded and took a new position as chief of staff at the War Office in Berlin. A close proximity to Hitler would afford him the chance of an assassination attempt. He would almost succeed. There had already been a number of attempts on Hitler's life – the Communist Josef 'Beppo' Römer tried several times – but the Führer had what is aptly described as 'the luck of the devil' when it came to dodging death.

Though the July Plotters were largely disgruntled conservatives, opposition to Hitler was drawn from many quarters. Protestant and Catholic churchmen were regular critics and he faced dissension from across the political spectrum, from ordinary citizens at home, those in the conquered territories and the military. There was acquiescence among the masses during the war but it was not uniform. Many brave Germans gave their lives in a bid to halt Hitler. Their sacrifice should not be overlooked.

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German troops march into the Rhineland, which had been designated a demilitarised zone in the wake of WWI

THE ROAD TO WAR

Between 1933 and 1939, Hitler oversaw an expansion plan that sent the world spiralling into war

Written by Will Lawrence

No European of his time had more potently imbibed the soldierly ethic than Adolf Hitler," wrote one of World War II's most celebrated historians. Hitler had volunteered in 1914 and proved a good soldier. After the war, the army encouraged him to join an embryonic nationalist movement, the German Workers' Party (a precursor to the Nazi Party), which he did along with other members of his regiment, including Captain Ernst Röhm, who founded the party's paramilitary arm, the SA, and Lieutenant Rudolf Hess.

From the outset, Nazism had a military ethos, and the ideals that Hitler professed – including the condemnation of the Treaty of Versailles and the lament for his country's loss of territory – pointed towards the militarisation he would later invoke. Some historians argue that Hitler was an opportunist without a clearly defined mission, or that his regime had little by way of coherent policy objectives, hamstrung as it was by internecine squabbling and personal empire building.

Others, however, see matters in a different light. They suggest Hitler had long harboured ambitions to undo the damage of Versailles by not just reclaiming former German territories, but also by expanding his country's borders. They add that policies such as the bid for racial purity, which fostered anti-Semitism and laws on euthanasia, were designed to prepare the nation for war, as was his elimination of not only his political opponents, but also any potential for political opposition. For it was war and conquest, he believed, rather than free trade, which would provide the bedrock for the social reconstruction he desired.

Germany was in a precarious position when Hitler assumed the chancellorship in 1933. As such, he could not openly advocate for a return to rearmament and conquest, at least not at first. Early in his tenure, when Hitler spoke to the nation on the radio for the very first time, he posed as a man of peace. When addressing the military command in early February 1933, however, he spoke of war.

Rearmament, he emphasised to the gathered soldiery, was pivotal. As was, "The conquest of new living space in the east and its ruthless Germanisation." He advocated the return of conscription once the state leadership had

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weeded out the pacifists, Marxists and Bolsheviks. The army, despite many of its aristocratic officers looking down on this social upstart, largely agreed. And whereas they had stood firmly against Hitler during his failed military putsch in 1923, a decade on, they now placed the country's most powerful institution at his disposal.

The rearmament programme began in earnest in 1934, with Hitler borrowing vast sums from overseas lenders, whom he had no intention of ever repaying. Under his guidance, Germany's economy prospered. In the words of one military historian, "What followed was one of the most remarkable and complete political and military revolutions ever carried through by one man."

Testing Versailles' limits

The process of rearmament was carefully managed. Hitler did not move to openly abrogate the tenets of Versailles, but carefully sidestepped them under the pretext of reactions to other nations' policies. France, for example, beset by a declining birth rate, announced that it was doubling the length of its conscripts' military service; Hitler suggested that this threatened his country's national security and therefore began the enlargement of the 100,000-strong army permitted by Versailles. Conscription was re-introduced to Germany.

In March 1935, under the same pretext, he announced the creation of the Luftwaffe, another breach of the treaty. He sought to mollify France's concerns by offering a pact that declared a limitation on Germany's army capped at 300,000, and an air force that would stand at half the strength of the French. When France refused the terms he blamed her intransigence for his increasing Germany's strength beyond these totals.

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The German army and air force were the great beneficiaries of Nazi economic policy

> "The Munich Agreement proved a turning point – Hitler abandoned appeasement, recognising the West did not want to fight"

Though the rebirth of conscription boosted troop numbers, the recruits were raw and under-equipped – unable, therefore, to withstand any military response from the great powers to this provocation. He desperately hoped to reclaim the Rhineland, but knew he must show restraint until events overseas presented a viable excuse.

That moment arrived courtesy of a move by the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini. The 1926 Locarno Agreement, with Britain and Italy as its guarantors, had assured the demilitarisation of the Rhineland. When Mussolini launched his invasion of Ethiopia (or Abyssinia as it was then known) in October 1935, it brought him into conflict with Britain and the League of Nations. Hitler pounced on the crisis, with Britain and Italy at loggerheads, and in March 1936 ordered troops into the demilitarised zone on the left of the Rhine.

A few months later, events in Europe offered Hitler a chance to further boost his martial construction. The Spanish Civil War erupted in July 1936 and when the Nationalists failed to take complete control of the country, their leader, General Franco, turned to both Hitler and Mussolini for help. Both dispatched substantial forces to Spain and this offered Hitler a chance to test his nascent armies in the cauldron of conflict. The lessons they learned would pay dividends when he turned his attention to Poland.

The German policy in Spain was to provide enough support to Franco to keep the conflict boiling but not enough to bring its conclusion. The longer it lasted, the longer it would hold the rest of Europe's attention. In the meantime, Hitler continued his rearmament programme unmolested and further tested his troops' readiness for battle.

Hitler at the Blohm+Voss shipbuilding and engineering works, which played a key role in the national rearmament

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HITLER AND THE ARMY

As soon as he was elected, Hitler embarked upon a seduction of the army

Hitler knew he had to handle the army with great care – it was the only institution that could readily remove him from power, and it had already hindered his ambitions during his failed coup of 1923. The army was also central to his future plans for Germany – rearmament and expansion. He would win its support.

Many within its ranks were aware that the armed forces, more than any other state institution, stood to benefit from National Socialism. State investment not only boosted the broader economy, it also significantly enhanced Germany's military, clipped as it was under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. Modern tanks and planes rolled out of the new factories and it was not long before there was enough armour to equip a force of six Panzer divisions. This would soon rise to ten. Rearmament also saw officers' career prospects brighten — more troops meant more positions.

Additionally, the armed forces were spared 'gleichschaltung', the process of bringing the organs of state under party control. And while Hitler appointed his allies to positions across government and the civil services, the army was, initially, allowed to act autonomously, promoting as it saw fit.

Hitler's ruthless treatment of the SA, the Nazi's paramilitary wing, won him further friends within the army, which had been concerned by its influence. The bloody purge of 1936, which saw the SA leaders murdered, also paved the way for the rise of the SS, a far more disciplined force with an elite military ethos.

War in Spain also fostered a positive relationship between Hitler and Mussolini. This facilitated Hitler's annexation of Austria, a move that was initially blocked by Italian opposition. The relationship was made stronger by Mussolini's visit to Germany in September 1937, a trip that left him mightily impressed with the country and its future potential. From then on, the self-styled Il Duce was interested only in further cementing the relationship between the two nations, an alignment he dubbed "the axis" — a name that would soon become known around the world.

Before the forging of this relationship, Hitler had already announced at the Nuremberg Party Rally of September 1936 the details of the Four Year Plan, a blueprint for what he envisaged as Germany's future self-sufficiency and a key building block in the rearmament process. His trusted aide Hermann Göring, the plan's chief architect, was charged with overseeing its execution, with its economic conclusion being designed to expedite Germany's territorial expansion.

Hitler had, in private, spoken of a four-year programme immediately after his appointment as chancellor in 1933, but the shift in world politics, and the immediate need for an economic programme to sit as the cornerstone of the 1936 Nuremberg Rally, saw the programme made public and it captured the attention of the press. The newspapers took up the title Four Year Plan and it went on to become an official decree on 18 October. A shift in Germany foreign policy would follow, with acts of open aggression coming to the fore.

In the run-up to this aggression, however, Hitler also worked for a peace. He had long suspected that should Europe descend into war, Britain would side with France. And yet this suspicion was tempered by hope. Hitler respected Britain and its impressive naval power, and recognised its ability to call on a well of military aid from its empire. He also recognised its Anglo-Saxon past and its racial ties to the Germanic heritage he so admired.

Hopes for a British union

He thought a pact with Britain might be possible with the signing of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement on 18 June 1935, negotiated by Joachim von Ribbentrop, which permitted the expansion of the German navy, the Kriegsmarine, on condition that its total tonnage would not exceed 35 per cent of the Royal Navy's. Ribbentrop also convinced Hitler that King Edward VIII was anti-Semitic and therefore pro-German. Hitler appointed Ribbentrop as the ambassador with a remit to entice Britain into an anti-communist pact.

The German battleship Bismarck in 1941

Despite Hitler's ambitions, the king's abdication in December 1936, coupled with increasing political tension over Abyssinia, the reoccupation of the Rhineland and Germany's involvement in Spain, meant that Hitler's hopes of an alliance began to ebb away. He therefore concentrated his efforts in forging closer ties with Italy, encouraged by Mussolini's anti-Bolshevist sentiments, and by looking beyond Europe to another military power with similar political ideals - Japan.

Though Ribbentrop had failed to bring Britain closer to Germany, he had proved the driving force in the rapprochement with Japan. By the end of 1937, Germany, Italy and Japan had all signed up to the Anti-Comintern Pact, an anti-communist alliance centred on policy towards Russia. Britain was also invited to sign, though it declined amid concerns over the coming together of the world's most expansionist powers.

Hitler was undeterred. His expansionist dream - the concept of lebensraum (or increased living space) was a central tenet of Nazi ideology

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The Nazi invasion of Czechoslovakia prompted Britain and France to issue warnings that they would not stand for further incursions

– was set to become reality. He needed more raw materials, while the claiming of pro-German territory would boost the potential number of recruits for his expanding armies. He turned his attention once more to Austria.

In a precursory move he dismissed the minister of war, General Werner von Blomberg, and the commander-in-chief of the army, Werner von Fritsch, who had expressed reservations, and with his trusted supporter Ribbentrop installed in the foreign office, he assuaged Italian concerns about the Tyrol region and encouraged the Austrian Nazi Party to bring its influence to bear.

Hitler and Chamberlain would strike a deal in the Munich Agreement of 1938, though Hitler would soon violate its terms

On 12 March, German troops marched into Austria. Despite an inauspicious showing of military efficiency, characterised by numerous mechanical breakdowns and mishaps, the move was a great success, with hordes of Austrians flooding the streets to greet the troops. When Hitler visited Vienna, where he had spent his youth, rapturous crowds cheered him. The German economy was boosted by the seizure of Austrian assets, including its gold reserve, and the military now had an even stronger base from which to launch an offensive against Czechoslovakia.

Hitler had suspected that the Western powers would do little to intervene with the annexation of Austria (a move known as Anschluss) and beyond their verbal protestation he was proved correct. He applied the same thought process to his next target: Czechoslovakia, while postulating that the Soviet Union would not come to its aid as the Red Army would have to cross Poland, which the latter would not permit.

He played up the (largely imagined and certainly grossly overstated) plight of the Sudeten Germans who lived just across his country's border and who, it was said, were suffering persecution. On 12 September, he delivered a strongly anti-Czechoslovakian speech at Nuremberg and soon after ordered troops to the border.

In spite of their apparent ambivalence over Anschluss, neither Britain nor France felt inclined to abandon Czechoslovakia to its fate. And yet neither had the stomach for war. In the wake of increasing German militarisation, both had embarked on rearmament processes of their own, but they knew they were lagging behind.

The final steps

The British prime minister, Neville Chamberlain, flew to Germany to try and dampen the crisis and Hitler informed him that to avert war, Czechoslovakia must cede the Sudetenland. Chamberlain promised he would try to ensure the demands were met. As the requested territory housed most of Czechoslovakia's border fortifications, Hitler presumed Chamberlain would fail and he would be able to justify an invasion. To Hitler's surprise, however, Chamberlain succeeded, prompting the Führer to raise his demands. This was a step too far and Chamberlain returned home to quicken rearmament, encouraging Germany to do the same. A world war seemed imminent.

And then Hitler changed his mind. Mussolini had made it clear that Italy was as yet unprepared for war, and with news that the Royal Navy had mobilised, the likes of Göring and Goebbels warned Hitler against further provocation at this stage. The German public also showed little enthusiasm for war. As a result, Hitler agreed to a conference at Munich and, on 30 September 1938, he settled for his original demands. Germany would acquire the Sudetenland, but would not invade Czechoslovakia.

REARMAMENT & THE ECONOMY

For Hitler, war not trade was the secret to rebuilding Germany's economy

Though he knew little about economics, Hermann Göring was charged with overseeing the Four Year Plan

The Nazi regime's martial intentions were apparent from the outset with the instant reinstatement of military trappings at the epicentre of public life. Conscription was reintroduced and, as the ranks of the armed services swelled, there were regular parades of troops and hardware.

The growth in hardware – with tanks at the centre – was born from an economic policy dominated by the rearmament programme. Within six months of Hitler's succession to the chancellorship, his economic policy was clear. In June 1933 he announced the assignation of one billion marks to a programme of job creation, while in secret he was planning with the minister of economics, Hjalmar Schacht, the minister of war, General Werner von Blomberg, and the ubiquitous Hermann Göring to invest 35 billion marks in military spending over an eight-year spell.

Hjalmar Schacht helped oversee the rearmament programme

According to a leading expert on the Nazi economy, "The Third Reich shifted a larger percentage of national resources into rearmament than any other capitalist regime in history." Its only competitor was Stalinist Russia.

Germany's investment stood in stark contrast to France and Britain's. In 1933, for example, Britain invested three per cent of its GDP in military spending, Germany just two per cent. By 1936, however, while Britain had raised spending to five per cent, Germany spent 11 per cent. In 1938, as Hitler prepared for all-out conflict, he was spending 17 per cent of Germany's GDP; Chamberlain was spending just eight per cent of Britain's. It is little wonder that Germany dominated the early stages of the war.

Rearmament saw the development and testing of a whole host of accessories. Here gas masks are put to the test

Almost immediately, he regretted his decision. In the wider world, the terms of the Munich Agreement were seen as a German success. But Hitler now regarded it as a failure. It proved a turning point. In its aftermath, Hitler abandoned any policies of appeasement and embarked on a course that was bound to bring Germany into armed conflict with the Western powers. His forces had grown sufficiently and he had now recognised that the West did not want to fight.

At home, the press was encouraged to whip up support among the general public for a wider war, and the persecution of the Jews intensified. Abroad, he dismissed the terms agreed in Munich and though granted the Sudetenland just six months previously, on 15 March 1939, German troops invaded Czechoslovakia.

Contrary to Hitler's thinking, the invasion sparked a determined response from Britain and France. On 17 March, Chamberlain announced that Britain would resist to the utmost of its power any further moves by Germany against less powerful states. Hitler was unperturbed and despite an announcement on 13 April that Britain and France would guarantee Poland's independence, Hitler pushed ahead with his preparations for war in the East.

Within Poland's borders nestled the largest chunk of territory that had been a part of the German empire before 1918. Hitler wanted it back. The rest of Poland, meanwhile, could be harnessed for lebensraum. Hitler reached out to Russia. When negotiations stalled, he gambled and offered Stalin a slice of eastern Poland if he agreed not to impede a German invasion from the west. Stalin agreed. Poland's fate was set. Hitler drew up an invasion plan and took another risk.

Again, the gamble paid off. He predicated that France would not launch an assault on Germany from the west and that Britain would not have time to mobilise effectively if he concluded the Polish campaign swiftly. Leaving only 44 divisions to defend the west against 100 French, the German army staff drew up two army groups for a twin-pronged attack. With Army Groups North and South comprising 62 divisions, including six armoured and ten mechanised, supported by 1,300 new combat aircraft, the Polish forces did not stand a chance.

To provide a pretext for the launch of hostilities, the SS staged a fake attack on a German radio station at Gleiwitz on the border with Silesia, dressing the bodies of dead concentration camp victims in Polish uniforms. Germany had to respond to "aggression" within its borders and at 4.45am, on 1 September 1939, tanks began to roll across the Polish border. Two days later, Britain and France declared war. Hitler had taken an irreversible step down the road towards mass conflict. A worldwide struggle was now certain. World War II had begun.

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HITLER AT WAR

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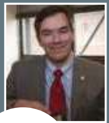
HITLER AT WAR

To what extent did the Führer's military leadership style affect the outcome of World War II? We get expert Dr Geoffrey Megargee's verdict on Adolf Hitler's tactical prowess

Written by Jonathan O'Callaghan

DR GEOFFREY MEGARGEE



Brief Bio

Dr Megargee wrote his book, *Inside Hitler's High Command*, after becoming a recipient of the J William Fulbright grant for his research in Germany. He is also a senior applied research scholar at the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Since the fall of the Third Reich in 1945, our verdict on Hitler's leadership has mostly come from the pens and mouths of his generals. Many of these men had grown to resent their former leader, and with the fall of Germany they seized the opportunity to criticise and embarrass the Führer at every opportunity. But beneath the façade of slander and betrayal, was Hitler's military leadership style truly so unpopular – and to what extent did his decisions determine the outcome of World War II?

"So much of what we thought we knew about Hitler for many years came from his generals, and they have a lot of reasons to either consciously or unconsciously falsify what happened," says Dr Geoffrey Megargee. "They more or less accused him of starting the war against their advice and then of losing it through his meddling, but that doesn't really give us an accurate picture."

When Germany declared war on Poland on 1 September 1939, they had not expected to encounter such fierce opposition from Britain and France. After both countries declared war on the Third Reich in response, the German population were distraught; World War I was still fresh in the nation's memory, and the country had only just started to thrive again from the harsh penalties imposed after their defeat in 1918 and later the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Now the leader of the Nazi party was dragging them into another war against familiar foes. Despite his popularity, Hitler was not immune to criticism and the start of World War II saw a significant drop in morale in Germany.

But that all changed when France fell in just a matter of weeks to Germany's Blitzkrieg tactics. According to Dr Megargee, "Once France was knocked out of the war, I suspect at that point Hitler probably reached about the high point of his popularity with the German population because Germany had just managed to defeat in a matter of weeks this enemy that had defeated them over four years of combat in World War I. That was quite a coup."

Riding on this success, Hitler quickly involved himself in all aspects of the operations of the German army – much more so than the respective leaders of other countries. He was known for an attention to detail that was interfering at best, and detrimental at worst. "Hitler was in charge of strategy from the start, figuring out against whom Germany was going to fight, and his decisions were not nearly so unpopular as [his generals] tried to say later on.

"They were all in favour of starting a war against Poland, they were all in favour of starting a war against the Soviet Union – these were not unpopular decisions on Hitler's part.

"But when we get down to the next level of warfare – operations, ie planning and conducting campaigns – here Hitler was on weaker ground. He had some good insights, and some of his decisions turned out well, but he didn't have any systematic training in this kind of warfare and that showed."

The popular picture of Hitler is of a man that heeded no advice – a leader that would rather listen to his own gut instinct than to the rational arguments of his generals. This was true to an extent; Hitler was distrustful of some of his senior officers, who in turn criticised him for his inexperience in warfare, and he certainly grew more distrustful and erratic as the war progressed.

That being said it was largely the officers themselves that have swayed our view of Hitler's leadership, as they resented his involvement in their military, as Dr Megargee points out. "General [Franz] Halder, for example – who was chief of the general staff from October 1938 to September 1942 – maintained a sort of passive-aggressive relationship with Hitler. He would agree openly with what Hitler had to say, but would then try to work around the decisions that Hitler made." However, for the first few years of the war at least, Hitler relied upon his generals greatly and would seek their advice on both strategy and tactics, albeit some more so than others.

The Führer, though, was not blithely ignorant; he was well aware of the hatred some of his officers felt towards him, and he used this to his advantage at every available opportunity. "He tended to play off commanders against each other. They would throw in their opinions at briefings and he would go with whoever he agreed with, so it was sort of a divide-and-conquer kind of approach to leadership. And once he made up his mind on something he could be extremely stubborn about it."

As mentioned the Führer had an uncanny attention to detail and thus involved himself in the smallest of minutiae about particular units, and many of his generals would be caught short if they could not supply him with precise information – such as, for instance, the number of tanks in a particular division. By 1943 Hitler had started bringing two stenographers (court recorders) to each of his meetings, and although many records were burned at the end of the war, those that survived reveal Hitler's meetings to be intricate to the point that they were discussing the movements of very small units on the front and their equipment.

Hitler's level of involvement was beginning to pose a problem. : "You could argue that Hitler was too detailed. When you start talking about how

The invasion of Poland

1-27 September 1939

On 1 September 1939, Nazi Germany invaded Poland, and just two days later both Britain and France declared war on Germany. World War II had begun.

The campaign in Poland was devised by General Franz Halder, chief of the general staff, but it was ultimately Hitler who gave the order to invade. Germany employed Blitzkrieg (which translates as 'lightning war') tactics, denting Poland's front lines with Panzer tanks and aircraft before troops moved through gaps this createdO. The approach was hugely successful, although it was not one that Hitler came up with. On 27 September 1939 Poland surrendered, albeit with a Soviet invasion from the east dividing the country.

The effects of this campaign were felt across the globe and signalled the start of World War II. Hitler would go on to employ the same tactics in other countries, including France in 1940.

The expert's view

"If Germany was going to have a war, then September 1939 was probably the best time to attack," says Dr Megargee. "The Allies were getting stronger, so the timing was working against Germany at that point and I think Hitler even said that. But, of course, he was counting on Britain and France to stay out of it. He figured they would let Poland go; he underestimated them on that point."

Verdict: **Success**

"The whole idea of starting the war was a poor strategic decision, but if Hitler was going to start one this was probably the best he could do."

General Franz Halder (left) with General Von Brauchitsch

Hitler watches on as German troops march towards Poland

> “When you start talking about how many trucks a particular unit has at its disposal, that’s just ridiculous for a head of state to try to interpret”

General Halder (at Hitler’s left) discussing plans with others over a large map

The Fall of France

10 May - 22 June 1940

Resigned to the fact that both Britain and France had declared war, Hitler knew that he needed to nullify France to have any chance of fending off the Allies. So, on 10 May 1940, Germany invaded its Gallic neighbour.

The campaign consisted of two operations. The first was Case Yellow (Fall Gelb), where German forces advanced into the Ardennes region and pushed the Allied forces in Belgium back to the sea. This ultimately resulted in the mass evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force at Dunkirk between 26 May and 4 June.

A second operation known as Case Red (Fall Rot) began on 5 June, with Germany’s air superiority and armoured units overcoming the depleted French forces. German forces pushed into Paris on 14 June, and by 22 June they had signed an armistice with the French that would see Germany occupy the north and the west of the country until 1944.

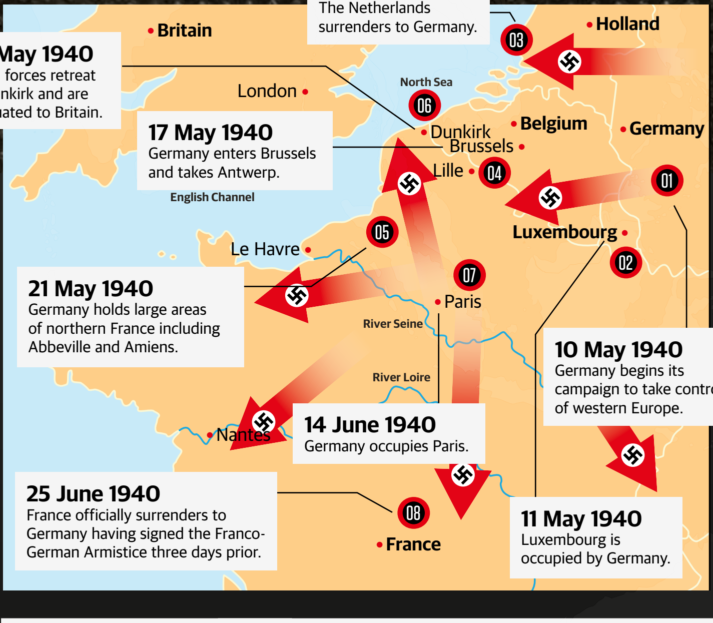
The two major operations were not Hitler’s doing. However, it was Hitler that ultimately convinced the German High Command to accept the plan, which undoubtedly was a significant factor in defeating France. The campaign prevented the stalemate that had occurred in World War I, and enabled Germany to begin focusing its attention on other foes.

The expert’s view

“Hitler - especially at this stage of the war - was extremely nervous about how it was going to all work out. He was very worried about the left flank of that attack going through the Ardennes to the coast of the English Channel, and he was worried that the French might counterattack. He was [pivotal] in getting the German High Command to accept [Erich von] Manstein’s plan to go through the Ardennes.”

Verdict: **Success**

“Hitler had a good instinct to go with what Manstein proposed. Hitler was on the right side of that decision.”



14 May 1940
The Netherlands surrenders to Germany.

26 May 1940
Allied forces retreat to Dunkirk and are evacuated to Britain.

17 May 1940
Germany enters Brussels and takes Antwerp.

21 May 1940
Germany holds large areas of northern France including Abbeville and Amiens.

10 May 1940
Germany begins its campaign to take control of western Europe.

14 June 1940
Germany occupies Paris.

25 June 1940
France officially surrenders to Germany having signed the Franco-German Armistice three days prior.

11 May 1940
Luxembourg is occupied by Germany.

Who was Erich von Manstein?

Born in Berlin on 24 November 1887, and after seeing service during World War I, Manstein was the chief of staff to Germany’s Army Group South at the start of World War II. He was one of the main instigators of an offensive through the Ardennes (known as Case Yellow or Fall Gelb) during the invasion of France in 1940, which ensured Germany a swift victory in Europe. He later attained the rank of general, but his constant criticism of Hitler’s strategies coupled with his failure to turn the tide at the Battle of Stalingrad in 1942 saw him ousted from the German army in March 1944. He was captured and imprisoned by the British in August 1945, and died almost 30 years later on 9 June 1973.

Hitler in Paris following the fall of France many trucks a particular unit has at its disposal, that's just ridiculous for a head of state to try to interpret as a military commander. There's no way that he can understand the situation well enough to an extent that it's going to make a positive difference on the battlefield." Such was the extent of his incessant attention for detail that by the end of the war almost no major unit was allowed to move without Hitler's express permission - especially one on the retreat.

Aside from Hitler's over-reliance on details, as the war dragged on he began to rely more and more upon his instincts, and "there were times that served him well, but a lot of times that didn't," Dr Megargee continues. "By [1944] he was sort of living in a fantasy land, frankly; he thought he was going to burst through the Allied lines and separate the British from the Americans and the whole Allied Western coalition would fall apart and he could go back to fighting the Russians [in the east]. By then his instinct had become delusional." At this point in the war Hitler's generals were doing their best to convince him of employing different tactics, such as initiating smaller offensives instead of large ones, but Hitler was having none of it.

For all his shortcomings, though, Hitler did at times make some smart decisions, but embarking on a war at all was a poor one. "The whole war was badly conceived to begin with.

The Battle of the Atlantic

3 September 1939 - 8 May 1945

For all his inexperience in ground warfare, Hitler was even more of a novice when it came to the sea. He didn't have any considerable knowledge of navies, and thus for the most part he left naval operations in the hands of generals he trusted including Erich Raeder and Karl Dönitz, who both served as commander-in-chief of the Kriegsmarine during the war.

The Battle of the Atlantic was the longest military campaign of World War II, running continuously from the outbreak of war on 3 September 1939 to 8 May 1945. The majority of the campaign was fought between the Kriegsmarine and the combined Allied navies of Britain and Canada, and later in 1941 the US. The Germans relied considerably on their U-boat submarines, with only a handful of warships available.

The campaign revolved largely around the Allied blockade of Germany and a subsequent counter-blockade by the Kriegsmarine. German U-boats attempted to attack convoy ships travelling across the Atlantic, but the strength of the Allied navies, combined with Hitler's decision to pull many U-boats away for other campaigns, would see the Allies gain control of the Atlantic and the Channel by 1944.

The expert's view

"Hitler was involved in some key decisions, especially to take U-boats away from the Atlantic and send them to Norway and the Mediterranean. One probably can't argue that those decisions weakened the Atlantic campaign fatally, but they certainly didn't help it."

Verdict: **Failure**

"Hitler's on-again, off-again decisions regarding resources for the construction of U-boats did hurt the [campaign] considerably."

The British Royal Navy battleship HMS Barham explodes as her 38cm (15in) magazine ignites

Officers on a destroyer, escorting a large convoy of ships, keep a lookout for enemy submarines in 1941

Key moments in World War II

1939

Outbreak of WWII
Hitler invades Poland and, two days later, Britain and France declare war on Germany, heralding the start of World War II.
1 September 1939

Atlantic warfare
For almost six years the longest military campaign of WWII sees the Allied and Axis powers fight for control of the Atlantic.
3 September 1939

Blitzkrieg strikes
Germany takes control of large portions of western Europe, including Belgium, culminating in the surrender of France.
25 June 1940

Luftwaffe air raids
The German Luftwaffe begins an air campaign against the UK, but the Royal Air Force (RAF) stands strong and is victorious almost four months later.
10 July 1940

The Battle of Britain

10 July – 31 October 1940

With France defeated with surprising swiftness, Hitler was unsure what to do next. The German High Command had been especially unconvinced that France would fall in such a short amount of time, and thus they set about deciding what Germany's next course of action should be.

Hitler was all too aware that Britain posed a significant threat and, with little chance of a diplomatic resolution, he would have to attack. The prospects of a potential invasion of Britain (known as Operation Sealion), however, were incredibly slim. The Royal Navy was far superior to the German Navy (Kriegsmarine), while the Royal Air Force posed a formidable threat in the skies. If an invasion were to happen, the German army wanted to get as many troops ashore as possible, while the Kriegsmarine was adamant that such an operation would be impossible.

With numerous options available, Hitler eventually opted to test out the defensive capabilities of Britain with an attack from the air. If the German Luftwaffe could manage to gain air superiority over the Royal Air Force, it could then keep the British Royal Navy at bay while Germany mounted an all-out ground invasion.

Britain, however, proved a much more stubborn opponent than Germany had ever anticipated, and ultimately the RAF was never in too much danger of succumbing to defeat. One of the key factors that affected the outcome was the decision for the Luftwaffe to switch from bombing British military targets and airfields to bombing cities such as London as a terror tactic.

With the Luftwaffe unable to gain air superiority, Hitler postponed Operation Sealion indefinitely in October 1940. However, the bombing of civilian Britain continued in what was to become known as the Blitz.

> "The Battle of France is over. The Battle of Britain is about to begin"
>
> **Winston Churchill, 18 June 1940**

About 6,000 Heinkel He 111s were built, but for the most part they were outperformed by British Hurricanes and Spitfires

The expert's view

"The popular image is that the RAF was sort of on the ropes when the Germans made the switch [from bombing airfields to cities], and that in effect took the pressure off [Britain]. On the other hand, while the RAF was having a hard time all they really had to do was withdraw a little farther back into the country and husband their resources and they still could have stopped an invasion quite effectively. I don't get the impression the Luftwaffe ever really had a good chance of knocking out the RAF."

Verdict: **Failure**

"Hitler may have been involved in the decision to go from attacking British airfields and radar stations to bombing London, but this certainly did not help the campaign."

1945

USSR invasion
Germany invades the Soviet Union, reneging on the Non-Aggression Pact that the two countries had signed in 1939.
22 June 1941

Pearl Harbor attack
Japanese fighter planes attack the American base at Pearl Harbor, killing over 2,000 people. Four days later, the USA enters the war.
7 December 1941

D-Day landings
An Allied campaign of over 300,000 soldiers begins landings in Normandy in northern France in order to break Germany's stranglehold on Europe.
6 June 1944

Hitler dies
Hitler commits suicide in his Führerbunker as Germany faces defeat in the Battle of Berlin with the Soviet Union. Germany surrenders eight days later.
1 May 1945

Nuclear attack
The US drops atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan, killing tens of thousands in an instant. On 2 September Japan surrenders and WWII ends.
6 and 9 August 1945

German troops moving into Russian territory in armoured vehicles in June 1941

Hitler poses with his senior officers and generals in June 1940

A soldier defending the German line with an MG 34 machine gun

To start with Germany made good progress into Russia, but the tide began to turn as winter set in

"By 1945 Hitler was all but dictating to his generals exactly what to do, and he had little trust left in any of them"

The idea that Germany could take on the British Empire, the Soviet Union and then the US at the same time was at the very least problematic. I've had people ask me when do I consider the war to have been lost, and I semi-jokingly say, '1 September 1939'."

With the hand Hitler had been dealt - or rather the hand he had dealt himself - he managed to conduct himself, and the army, in a reasonable manner at the start of the conflict.

The invasion of Poland was arguably his only course of action once the wheels of war had been set in motion, and the manner in which Germany conquered not only Poland but other nations, such as France, was commendable; they had swiftly and effectively seized control of a large chunk of Europe, thanks to Hitler's belief that France could be beaten. What he didn't count on, however, was the steadfast refusal of Britain to enter into any sort of diplomatic negotiations.

"With Britain not giving up his options were becoming extremely limited. He was in an economic bind; he was not going to be able to continue this war over the long run against the British because, sooner or later, Germany was going to run out of strength for that - even with the tentative support of the Soviet Union.

"So he made the decision for strategic and economic and ideological reasons to attack the Soviet Union - something he was more or less intending to do all along anyway. That decision was based on the assumption - which his generals shared and backed - that the USSR would collapse - that there would be one short military campaign which would destroy the Red Army. Obviously that didn't work out very well."

Indeed, the war came to a point in 1941 where defeat for Germany seemed all but inevitable and Hitler's strategic choices became ever-more limited. By 1942, after a second attempt at defeating the Soviet Union had failed, Dr Megargee suggests that, for Hitler, it became "just a matter of holding out as best he could in the hope that the Allied coalition would break up. And it became more based on delusion than anything else."

By 1945 Hitler was all but dictating to his generals exactly what to do, and he had little trust left in any of them. But by then, and possibly even much earlier, for all the strategic knowledge in the world, Hitler had no hope of leading the Third Reich to victory. "I think quite honestly his biggest strategic mistake was starting the war.

"Beyond that you get into details, and there are arguments to be made for each of the strategic decisions he made after that - declaring war on the Soviet Union and the United States, for example - but that's all within the context of a war in which Germany was, I won't say fated to lose, but certainly was not going to win easily."

Hitler's deterioration from sanity to irrationality, therefore, was not the deciding factor in the war, however there can be little doubt that his leadership style did little to help what was already a difficult cause for Germany.

Perhaps even with the greatest generals in the world the Third Reich would have been defeated; of that we cannot be certain. What we do know, however, was that Hitler was not the great military leader he himself thought he was. For his handful of victories there was a truckload of defeats, and his refusal to listen to reason ultimately accelerated Nazi Germany down the path to defeat.

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BLITZKRIEG

HITLER'S LIGHTNING WAR

There are few instances in modern warfare where two equally matched powers fought such a one-sided contest. The Battle for France was over in weeks…

Written by Will Lawrence

The blitzkrieg, or 'lightning war', is a German term that was coined by Western media to characterise the rapidity and proficiency of Germany's invasion of Poland in September 1939. That conflict, which pitted the burgeoning military prowess of a resurgent Germany against the numerically deficient and under-gunned Polish, was no contest. Hitler, however, hoped that this show of strength might persuade Britain and France to recognise his occupation.

They did not, and by early October he had already promulgated Fall Gelb, or 'Case Yellow', an attack on the west that would push through Luxembourg, Belgium and Holland, damaging the armies of the French and her allies and establishing a base for an assault by air and sea on Britain, before pushing for the conquest of France.

At this stage, while Hitler had a firm idea of what he had hoped the 'Yellow' could achieve, he did not have a clear concept for its technical specificity. Like the previous heads of state in Germany, and in Prussia beforehand, Hitler delegated the intricacies to his military chiefs, a decision that invited procrastination and delay, with the man initially charged with the plan's formulation, General Halder, failing to acquiesce to Hitler's various demands for a quick and decisive victory.

With Hitler at this stage enjoying only limited support among the military high command, the plan of attack underwent a number of revisions, the generals (quite rightly) insisting that autumn and then winter were not the seasons for a full-scale invasion. It was down to one of Hitler's few allies to jog his plan forward.

This was General von Manstein, the chief of staff for Army Group A, whose idea was to stake everything on a surprise attack by a heavily mechanised force through the Ardennes, hammering against the weakest section of the French defence, north of the sprawling fortresses of the Maginot Line. This would be a second blitzkrieg, offering an even greater prize than that unleashed against the Poles.

The penetrative striking role was to fall on Army Group A, comprising seven of the ten available German panzer divisions. They would push through to the River Meuse and then either

German troops moved through the forests of the Ardennes, catching the Allies by surprise

© Alamy

© Alamy

sweep south of the Maginot, or along the Somme valley towards the Channel coast. Army Group B, meanwhile, comprising three panzer divisions, was to draw the Allied forces into Belgium and hold them there so that they could not move against Army Group A's unprotected right flank. Army Group C, with no panzer divisions, would engage the garrisons defending the Maginot so that they could not move against A's left flank.

The attack opened on 10 May and it began with a Luftwaffe assault. Around 500 twin-engined bombers took to the skies in the early morning, bound for 72 designated airfields in France, Belgium and Holland. Before first light, paratroopers were dropping into positions close to the Hague and Leyden. One of the most daring assaults came against the Belgian fortress of Eben-Emael, where troops used the element of surprise to land gliders on the roof, pinning the defenders inside and using concrete-piercing explosives to force entry.

The element of surprise was key and nowhere was it better employed than against the Dutch, a neutral country. Holland's tiny army had not fought a war for more than 100 years. Across the centuries the Lowlanders' best form of defence had been to retreat among the complex network of canals surrounding Amsterdam and from there engaging in a guerrilla-type war, but this strategy faltered in the modern age as Luftwaffe bombs tumbled from the skies. When the paratroopers of 22nd Airborne Division landed deep in the heart of Holland to await the arrival of Army Group B, the game was up. By 15 May the Dutch government had capitulated.

Belgium fared little better. She too had hoped to remain neutral and therefore would not allow Anglo-French forces to take up positions within her territory, though she had passed on details of an early incarnation of 'Yellow', which fell into her hands during January of 1940.

The attack unfolded as Hitler had hoped, Army Group B's assault on Belgium drawing the British and French forward and though they knew the Belgians, for all their tenacity, were withdrawing ahead of them, spirits remained high. The Allies believed this was the main enemy effort, and they were confident that their superior numbers would check the advance.

But it was through the supposedly impenetrable Ardennes that the main German thrust was coming as the heavily mechanised Army Group A rumbled forward. The largest concentration of tanks ever seen was more than 160 kilometres deep and it met little effective resistance as it pushed on to the River Meuse.

Its main concerns were logistical – here were 86 divisions employing around 1,800 tanks – as Panzers and armoured vehicles, artillery and supply columns became ensnarled in traffic jams, and staffers fought frantically to co-ordinate movement orders.

And yet still the push continued. By the evening of 12 May the first armoured divisions had arrived at the Meuse in two positions and though bridges had been blown and the French resistance was stiff, the Germans powered on. By the end of the following day, four bridgeheads had been established, the Luftwaffe's heavy bombers and Stuka dive-bombers paralysing French artillery positions while anti-tank and anti-aircraft fire

The Panzer 35(t) with its 37mm cannon was co-opted from the Czech forces

The British Expeditionary Force fought bravely in the north but was no match for Germany's Army Group B

neutralised French defensive emplacements on the west bank.

Infantry and motorcycle regiments were the first to cross, and these pushed on a further 16 kilometres, to Chemery, while the highly effective General Heinz Guderian personally oversaw the construction of a pontoon bridge for his tanks. This was the ideal time for an Allied counterattack, targeting the congested bridgeheads and makeshift pontoon but only a token effort was launched and it soon fell back.

The Germans' strike through the Ardennes had allowed them to emerge at a junction between the French Second and Ninth Armies, which contained many poorly trained reserves. The French, unlike the Germans, had not used the 'Phoney War' over the preceding eight months to train up their reserves, and when on the evening of 14 May the Ninth elected to fall back to a new defensive position 16 kilometres further west, Guderian's bridgehead was some 48 kilometres wide and 24 kilometres deep.

On 14 May British and French bombers bid to destroy the vital pontoon bridge at Sedan but around half of the 170 heavy aircraft were shot down. 'Flak had its day of glory,' according to Guderian.

There was now a breach opening in the French defensive line - from Sedan in the south through to Dinant around 80 kilometres north - and the German's three vanguard panzer corps from Army Group A poured through, Guderian around Sedan and the wily Major-General Erwin Rommel through Dinant. The French Ninth Army's withdrawal, had allowed Lieutenant-General Reinhardt to cross his tanks, in between the other two panzer corps, at Monthermé.

Rommel and Reinhardt then thrust onwards through 15 May, manoeuvring behind the panicked troops of the Ninth Army. The French Army's Indo-Chinese machine-gunners, who had put up a spirited defence of the river crossing, were bypassed (their tenacity portending what would unfold in Vietnam many years later) and their comrades from the Ninth were soon surrendering in droves.

Elsewhere, more seasoned French troops offered sterner resistance. Further north above Dinant, the First Army fought bravely, as it would do until it was eventually surrounded at Lille. The Ninth Army rallied with the appointment of General Henri Giraud, and Charles de Gaulle launched counterattacks with his 4th Armoured Division, though while these were courageous they were largely ineffectual.

As the German panzers broke through, Hitler and his chiefs of staff urged caution. General Halder, for example, wanted to line the rapidly advancing panzer corridor with the infantry battalions who were lagging far behind the main advance; the panzers had advanced 64 kilometres since their crossing of the Meuse.

THE OPPOSING FORCES

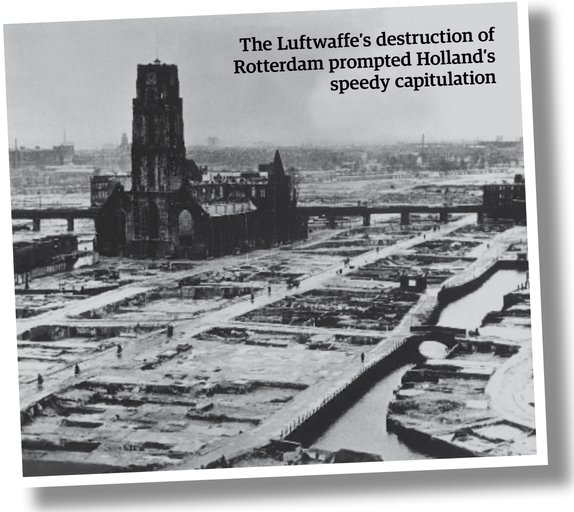
The Allies were no match for Hitler's marauding army

In terms of numbers and materials available during the Battle for France, the German and Anglo-French forces were evenly matched, certainly on the ground. The Germans had 136 divisions in the west, around a third of which were battle-hardened 'crack' troops. The French and British together had 104 divisions, along with 22 Belgian and 10 Dutch.

The Allies could call on around 3,000 tanks, the Germans around 2,500, though just shy of 1,500 of these were weaker Panzer I and Panzer II models. The most effective German armour was its 349 Panzer III and 278 Panzer IV models, along with about 330 Czech tanks that had been absorbed into the panzer regiments. The best Allied tanks were the French S-35 and the Char B1. The former, known as the Souma, was widely regarded among the best tanks in the world at the time. It was in the air that Germany dominated. The French aircraft totalled around 1,200 fighters and bombers with the RAF adding around 600 more. The Luftwaffe's air strength, meanwhile, comprised somewhere between 3,000-3,500 fighters, bombers and reconnaissance planes, and they worked in tandem with their ground forces. The Stuka dive-bomber, in particular, proved a vital strike weapon during the first few days of the campaign.

> "It was in the air that Germany dominated, with 3,000-3,500 fighters, bombers and recon planes"

The French S-35 tank, or Souma, boasted 40mm armour and a hefty 47mm turret-mounted cannon



The Luftwaffe's destruction of Rotterdam prompted Holland's speedy capitulation

On the ground, the dynamic commanders like Guderian and Rommel were itching to push onward to the Channel coast. All of the seven panzer divisions from Army Group A were across the Meuse and massing into an enormous iron fist, while before them they saw the Second and Ninth Armies simply disintegrate. They felt victory was well within their grasp, and indeed it was.

Elsewhere, the French garrisons to the south were imprisoned in the Maginot Line; with no effective transport they were completely unable to mobilise. In the north, meanwhile, the French First Army, the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), and the remaining Belgian forces were gradually giving ground to Army Group B. Nevertheless, Hitler's anxieties ultimately won through and the German advance was ordered to a complete halt on 17 May.

And yet, as Hitler and his high command argued, the panzers started up again and rolled further forward. By 19 May Guderian's divisions were just 80 kilometres from Abbeville at the mouth of the Somme; their arrival there would split the Allied forces in two. The Allies needed to counterattack before it was too late and the French Chief of General Staff, General Gamelin, ordered a combined counteroffensive from the Allied armies north and south of the Somme.

This was the way to deal with blitzkrieg - attack the panzer corridors' unprotected flanks - but his order came just as General Weygand replaced him on 19 May. Weygand cancelled the order while he assessed the situation. When he formulated a similar plan on 21 May it was already too late. The Germans had reached Abbeville, the Ninth Army

GERMAN INVASION OF THE WEST

1. INVASION BEGINS

10 May

Army Group B moves in from the north, drawing Allies forward. Army Group A moves through the Ardennes while Army Group C engages the Maginot Line to the south.

2. DINANT & MONTHERMÉ

12-15 May

Erwin Rommel overwhelms feeble resistance at Dinant and crosses the River Meuse while, shortly after, when the Ninth Army falls back Reinhardt crosses at Monthermé.

3. BATTLE OF SEDAN

13-14 May

Guderian overcomes the French at Sedan and crosses the River Meuse. With Guderian, Rommel and Reinhardt all across, the panzer breakout begins.

4. REACHING ABBEVILLE

20 May

When the Germans reach the Channel coast at Abbeville they cut off Anglo-French forces north of the River Somme, leaving them trapped in the Dunkirk pocket.

5. OPERATION DYNAMO

26 May - 4 June

Hitler's decision to halt the panzer advance on 24 May gives the British and French a chance to secure the Dunkirk perimeter and begin the evacuation of the BEF.

6. PARIS FALLS

14 June

Fall Rot, the final conquest of France (5 June), sees the Germans enter Paris within nine days, a crushing blow for the Allies. The end is almost nigh...

7. ARRIVING IN BREST & BORDEAUX

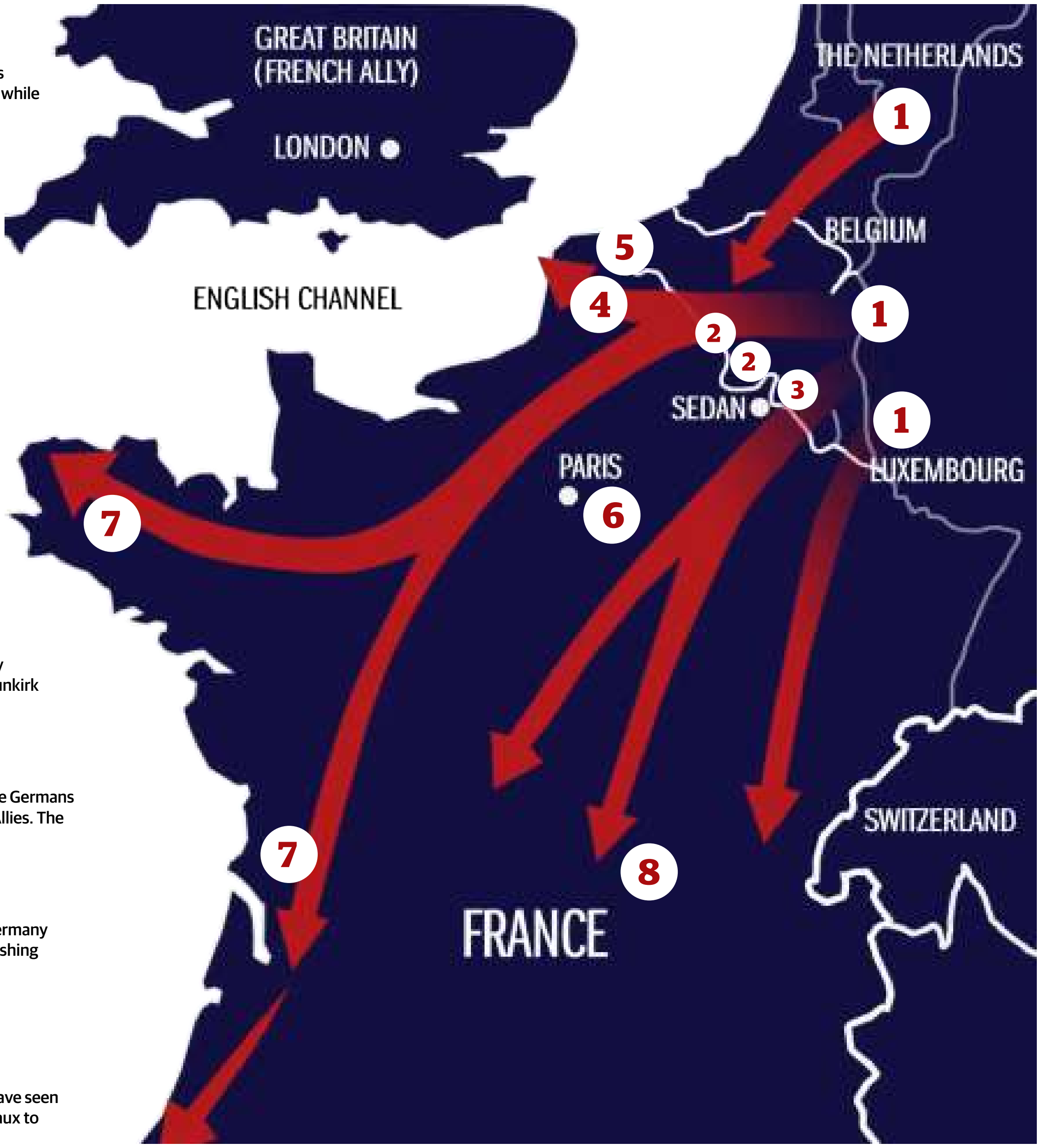
19 June

Hoth's panzer corps reach Brest on 19 June, giving Germany full command of the French Channel coast, before pushing south to take Bordeaux.

8. FRANCE SIGNS ARMISTICE WITH GERMANY

22 June

By the time France surrenders Fall Gelb and Fall Rot have seen Germany take control of a line stretching from Bordeaux to the Swiss frontier.



had disintegrated, and the First Army and BEF were too constricted in the north.

The counterattacking plan's efficacy became evident on 21 May when members of the BEF launched a counteroffensive at Arras, two tank battalions (74 tanks), two infantry regiments and 70 tanks from the French 3rd Light Mechanised Division thrusting into the flanks of Rommel's 7th Panzer Division and the fearsome SS Totenkopf Division, temporarily wreaking havoc. Though outnumbered, the British tanks' heavier armour gave them a clear advantage in this close-range slugfest and even the mighty warrior Rommel was shaken. He wrongly estimated that no fewer than five divisions had assailed him.

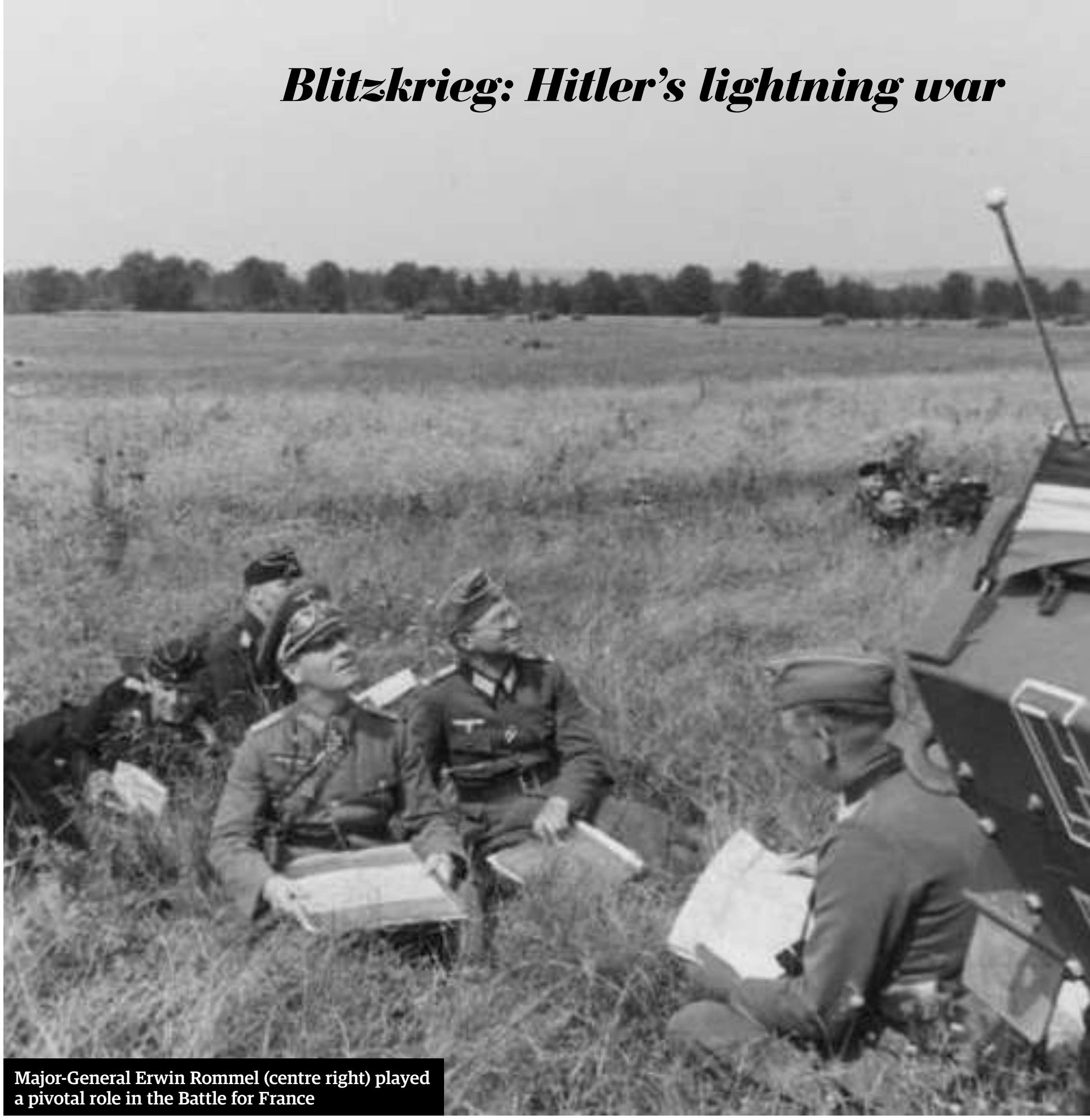
Though doing little to check the overall German advance, the attack at Arras proved pivotal for the BEF. It confirmed to the German high command that its panzer spearhead was pushing too far, too fast, and it prompted the fateful decisions to halt the panzer thrust to the Channel coast on 24 May. They remained immobile for two days. This bought the BEF vital time. For on 26 May Operation Dynamo was launched to extract the BEF from the beaches and harbour at Dunkirk. The BEF was Britain's only army and it could no longer risk obliteration in the face of such a brutal German onslaught.

Certainly, Hitler did not want the BEF to escape. Mistakenly, he thought evacuation by sea would prove impossible given the Luftwaffe's aerial supremacy, and he gave the honour of the BEF's destruction to Göring and his air forces. By the time Hitler realised his error, however, Dunkirk's defences had been completed and, thanks to the courage of the Navy, countless small boat owners and the RAF, over 300,000 Allied troops were evacuated by the time Dunkirk fell on 4 June.

Though Operation Dynamo's success is seen as a victory in Britain, the reality was different. Hitler had missed the chance to crush Britain's one standing army, but the Dunkirk withdrawal marked the climax of a brilliant whirlwind assault that had virtually assured the outcome of the Battle for France. The Belgian army surrendered north of Dunkirk on 27 May, and the hardy troops of the French First Army were forced into surrender at Lille three days later.

In just three weeks the Germans had taken more than a million prisoners while losing only around 60,000 men. They had routed the British from France and destroyed the Dutch and Belgian armies. The French had lost 30 of their 90 divisions and were now almost entirely devoid of tanks with just three armoured divisions remaining. The only Allies still fighting their corner were two British divisions still engaged south of the Somme.

Weygand was left with 66 divisions, many of which were depleted and they now had a front that was even longer than that which had borne the brunt of the blitzkrieg assault. The Germans, meanwhile, could deploy 89 infantry divisions and 15 panzer and motorised infantry divisions, the latter split into five groups, each comprising two panzer divisions and one motorised infantry. These would provide the model for land combat for the remainder of the war in Europe.



Major-General Erwin Rommel (centre right) played a pivotal role in the Battle for France

> "Hitler had missed the chance to crush Britain's one standing army, but the Dunkirk withdrawal marked the climax of a brilliant whirlwind assault"

The Luftwaffe, meanwhile, continued to operate in precise conjunction with the army and it could put some 2,500 strike aircraft – fighters and bombers – into the air. The French, on the other hand, even with aircraft hastily purchased from the USA, and those dispatched by the RAF, could count on fewer than half that number. When the second part of the German offensive, Fall Rot, or 'Case Red', began in earnest on 5 June, France was already doomed.

Weygand and his remaining troops offered a spirited resistance and the defence of the 'Weygand Line', stretching from the Channel at Abbeville to the Maginot Line, was organised via a strategically sound principle based on a chequerboard, whereby woods and villages were crammed with men and anti-tank weapons, capable of fighting independently and able to operate even if passed by the panzer spearheads.

The defence failed, however, though not because of cowardice or lack of cunning. It faltered because the French lacked the necessary materials. The defenders fought hard and even enjoyed some successes, especially on 5 and 6 June, inflicting heavy losses on enemy tanks. Still, the first Germans arrived in Paris on 14 June, and though there are numerous accounts of continuing courage and self-sacrifice France offered her unconditional surrender at Compiègne on 22 June. The Battle for France was won.

France's defeat was so swift and complete that many students of war were unable to fully comprehend it. The French forces were poorly equipped for mobile operations, many were poorly trained, and for the large part they were poorly led. Simply put, France had fallen to a superior war machine. In 1940 it was the power of blitzkrieg that ensured Hitler's victory in the west. By the end of June he'd cast covetous eyes across the Channel at Britain. The fate of Europe now hung in the balance.

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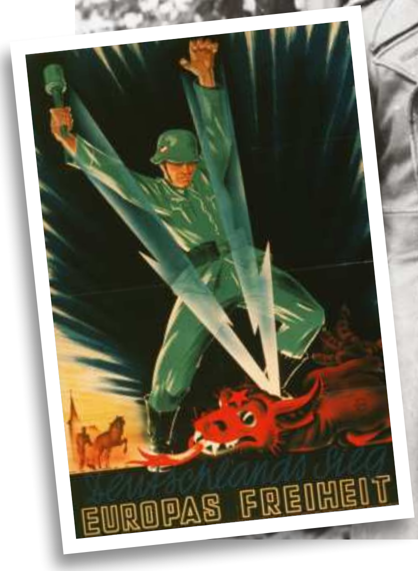
HITLER VS STALIN
OPERATION BARBAROSSA

When World War II's totalitarian titans clashed, Eastern Europe turned red with blood and the Soviet Union was brought to the brink of collapse

Written by Jack Griffiths and Michael Haskew

War of total annihilation was about to begin. The target of the Nazi wrath was the Soviet Union, the communist powerhouse that dominated from the Baltic Sea to the North Pacific. Since penning *Mein Kampf* in 1925, German dictator Adolf Hitler had made it his mission to supply the German people with the Lebensraum - living space - he believed they needed and end what he saw as the creeping evil of Bolshevism, the revolutionary creed that, as he saw it, threatened the fragile German republic of the 1920s. This wasn't just any military campaign - it was a clash between two mutually exclusive ideologies that viewed each other with absolute contempt, two totalitarian dictatorships that ruled through fear and demanded absolute, unthinking obedience, and two all-powerful monsters that commanded their war effort from the highest level. In the spring of 1941, Austrian failed artist Adolf Hitler would break his pact with Georgian bank robber Josef Stalin - and millions would pay for their arrogance.

Walther von Brauchitsch and Adolf Hitler oversee the victory parade of the Wehrmacht in Poland 1939



FROM THE BALTIC TO THE BLACK SEA

> "We only have to kick in the door and the whole rotten structure will come crashing down" **HITLER'S PREDICTION FOR JUNE 1941**

Contrary to popular myth, there was no single 'blitzkrieg' doctrine in the German Army – their successes of 1939 and 1940 were built on a mobile warfare doctrine developed after World War I, coupled with a strong professional officer corps and air superiority.

By December 1940, though, Hitler had been seduced by his own propaganda. Convinced the USSR would crumble in the face of a knock-out blow, Führer Directive 21 outlined the plan of what was to become Operation Barbarossa – named for the Holy Roman Emperor who led the Third Crusade. 134 full-strength divisions were committed to the new front under Field Marshal Walther von Brauschitsch, spread over the continent from Memel in the north to Odessa in the south.

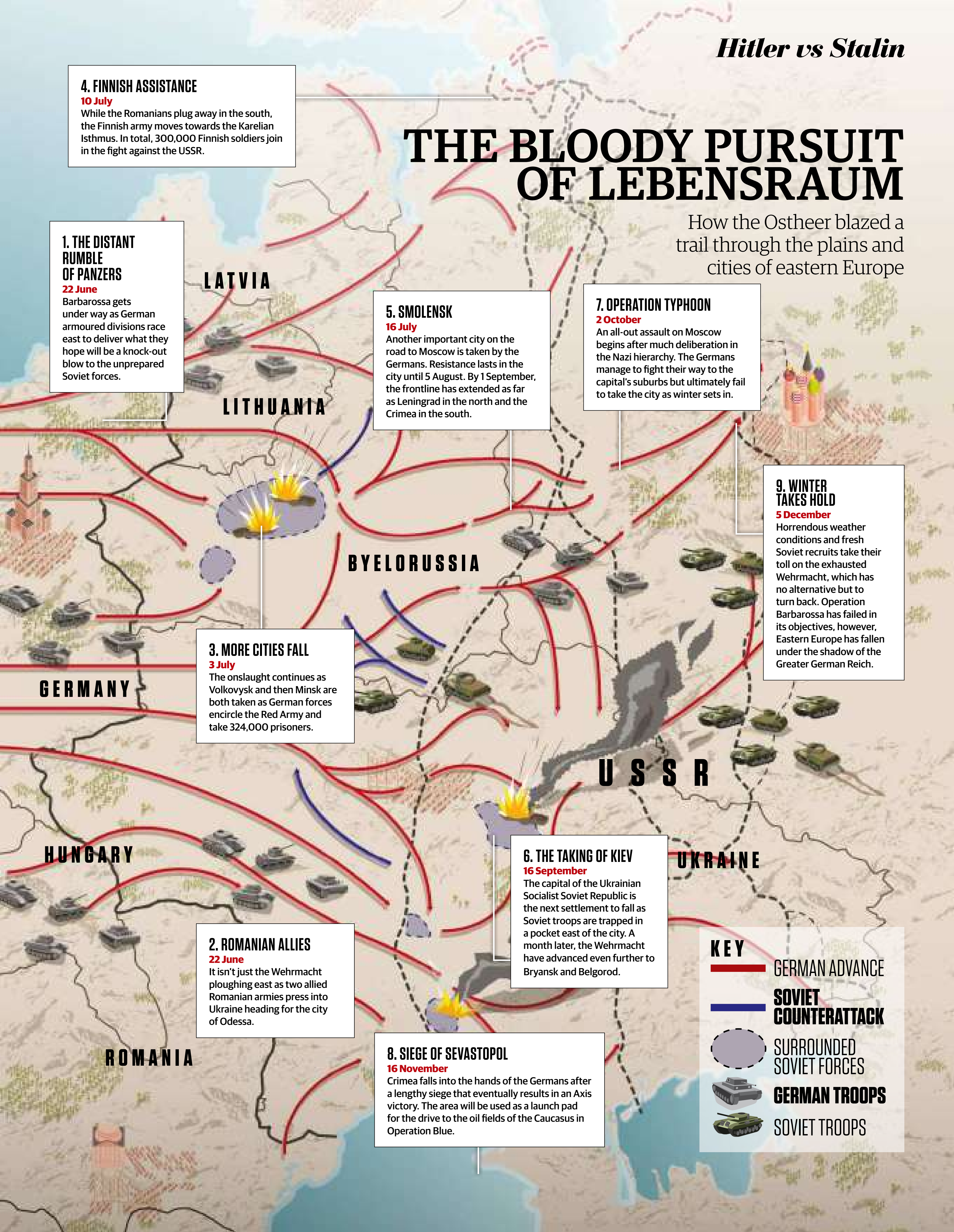
The 1939 German-Soviet non-aggression pact that had carved up Eastern Europe for the two despots was torn up, and Hitler confidently predicted the invasion would take a mere ten weeks. The tactical pre-emptive strike would be fought by the Ostheer on three fronts by Army Groups North, South and Centre, and aimed to expel all Soviet forces behind the Arkhangelsk-Astrakhan (A-A) Line and take Leningrad, Moscow and Kiev. Army Group Centre, led by WWI veteran Field Marshal Fedor von Bock, would take the same route as Napoleon's ill-fated invasion of Russia 129 years prior.

To ensure the Germans didn't suffer the same fate, General Friedrich Paulus was entrusted with undertaking a strategic survey of the attack zone. Paulus advised encirclement tactics to prevent the Red Army retreating and overstretching German supply lines, locking them into a costly guerrilla war in the Soviet interior. Barbarossa was delayed by over a month as German forces experienced stiffer opposition than expected in the Balkans. The Yugoslavs in particular put up fierce resistance and Hitler was forced to take over the Italian invasion of Greece. The delay could have given the Kremlin time to rally defences but, despite warnings, Stalin was sure Hitler would not invade until Britain was under German occupation.

The Soviet leader was tipped off as early as December 1940, and was reminded of the threat in a message sent by Churchill in April 1941. Stalin was given one final chance to mobilise his troops on 21 June 1941, the eve of Barbarossa. Wehrmacht Sergeant-Major Alfred Lishof, who had deserted his unit and been taken in by Soviet soldiers, claimed a German attack was imminent. Stalin rebuffed his warnings. He received a rude awakening the next day: the war for the east had begun.

THE BLOODY PURSUIT OF LEBENSRAUM

How the Ostheer blazed a trail through the plains and cities of eastern Europe



1. THE DISTANT RUMBLE OF PANZERS

22 June

Barbarossa gets under way as German armoured divisions race east to deliver what they hope will be a knock-out blow to the unprepared Soviet forces.

2. ROMANIAN ALLIES

22 June

It isn't just the Wehrmacht ploughing east as two allied Romanian armies press into Ukraine heading for the city of Odessa.

3. MORE CITIES FALL

3 July

The onslaught continues as Volkovysk and then Minsk are both taken as German forces encircle the Red Army and take 324,000 prisoners.

4. FINNISH ASSISTANCE

10 July

While the Romanians plug away in the south, the Finnish army moves towards the Karelian Isthmus. In total, 300,000 Finnish soldiers join in the fight against the USSR.

5. SMOLENSK

16 July

Another important city on the road to Moscow is taken by the Germans. Resistance lasts in the city until 5 August. By 1 September, the frontline has extended as far as Leningrad in the north and the Crimea in the south.

6. THE TAKING OF KIEV

16 September

The capital of the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic is the next settlement to fall as Soviet troops are trapped in a pocket east of the city. A month later, the Wehrmacht have advanced even further to Bryansk and Belgorod.

7. OPERATION TYPHOON

2 October

An all-out assault on Moscow begins after much deliberation in the Nazi hierarchy. The Germans manage to fight their way to the capital's suburbs but ultimately fail to take the city as winter sets in.

8. SIEGE OF SEVASTOPOL

16 November

Crimea falls into the hands of the Germans after a lengthy siege that eventually results in an Axis victory. The area will be used as a launch pad for the drive to the oil fields of the Caucasus in Operation Blue.

9. WINTER TAKES HOLD

5 December

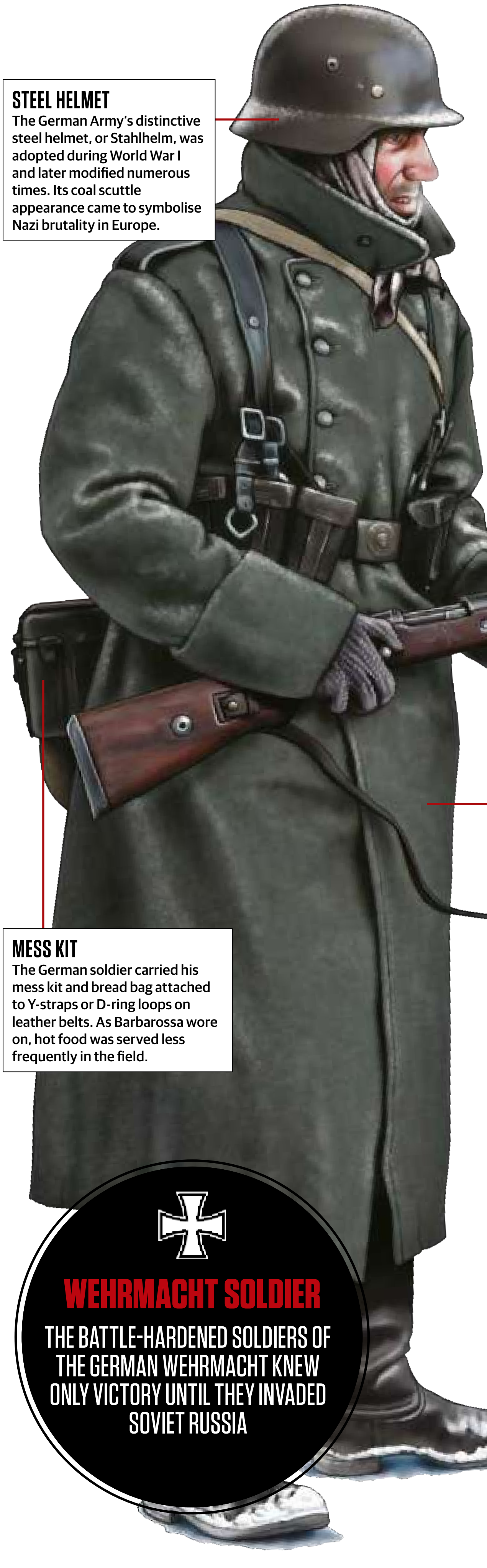
Horrendous weather conditions and fresh Soviet recruits take their toll on the exhausted Wehrmacht, which has no alternative but to turn back. Operation Barbarossa has failed in its objectives, however, Eastern Europe has fallen under the shadow of the Greater German Reich.

HITLER'S ARMOURED STORM

The ill-prepared Red Army and the fury of the oncoming assault was a lethal cocktail for the USSR. Stalin's purges of generals had put his forces at a severe disadvantage and the troops were growing weary of constant supervision by the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD). The Soviets may have had up to three times the number of tanks and aircraft as the Third Reich but they were widely dispersed across the vast country, lacked strong command and suffered from obsolete technology. The first major engagement of the Baltic front was the Battle of Raseiniai beginning on 23 June. The attack included a huge bombardment from both ground artillery and the Luftwaffe, which crippled Soviet airfields, seeing the Soviet Air Forces lose 25 per cent of its strength. Mechanised divisions covered up to 80 kilometres a day as the front went further eastwards, while the infantry was behind them, yomping 30 kilometres a day. Encircling the shell-shocked Soviets was paying off as pincer movements accounted for hundreds of thousands of prisoners of war. In early July, Białystok and Minsk also fell as the Red Army retreated from Belarus to the banks of the Dnieper River. The Wehrmacht exerted technical and tactical dominance, with 750 German armoured vehicles crushing 3,500 Soviet armoured vehicles at the Battle of Brody between 23-30 June.

> "What India was for England the territories of Russia will be for us… The German colonists ought to live on handsome, spacious farms"
>
> **HITLER ON HIS PLANS FOR THE LEBENSRAUM**

German troops enter Russia during the early stages of the invasion, June 1941



WEHRMACHT SOLDIER

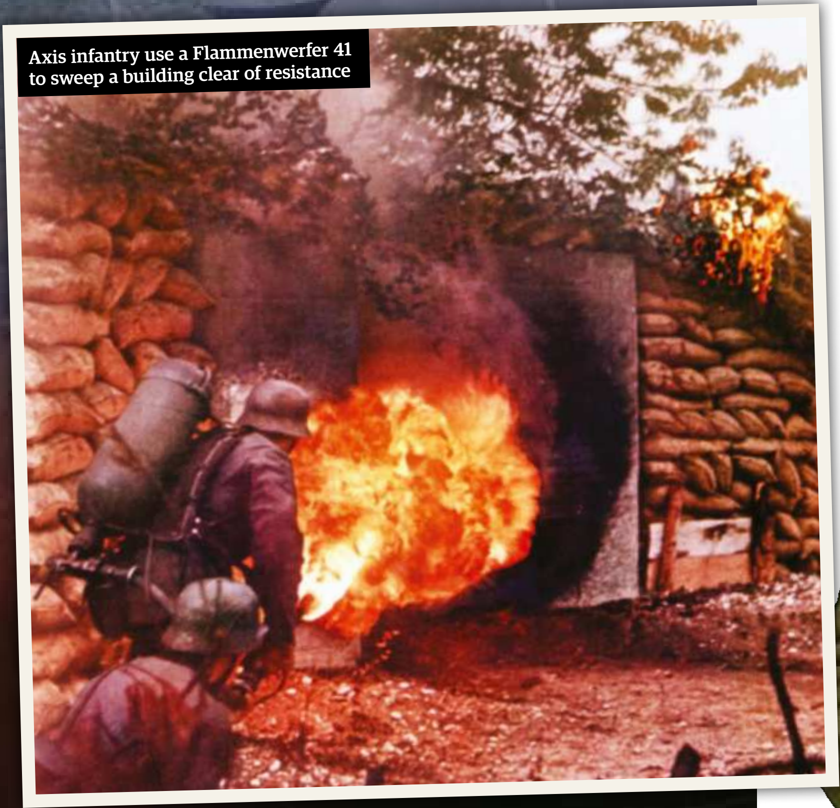
THE BATTLE-HARDENED SOLDIERS OF THE GERMAN WEHRMACHT KNEW ONLY VICTORY UNTIL THEY INVADED SOVIET RUSSIA

STEEL HELMET
The German Army's distinctive steel helmet, or Stahlhelm, was adopted during World War I and later modified numerous times. Its coal scuttle appearance came to symbolise Nazi brutality in Europe.

MAUSER RIFLE
This German soldier carries the iconic bolt-action Mauser Karabiner 98 kurz, or K98k, firing a 7.92mm cartridge. The K98k was the standard-issue Wehrmacht infantry rifle during World War II.

WINTER GEAR
This German soldier is fortunate to have an overcoat, heavy boots and gloves to protect against the Russian winter. Many German soldiers on the Eastern Front had only their summer uniforms.

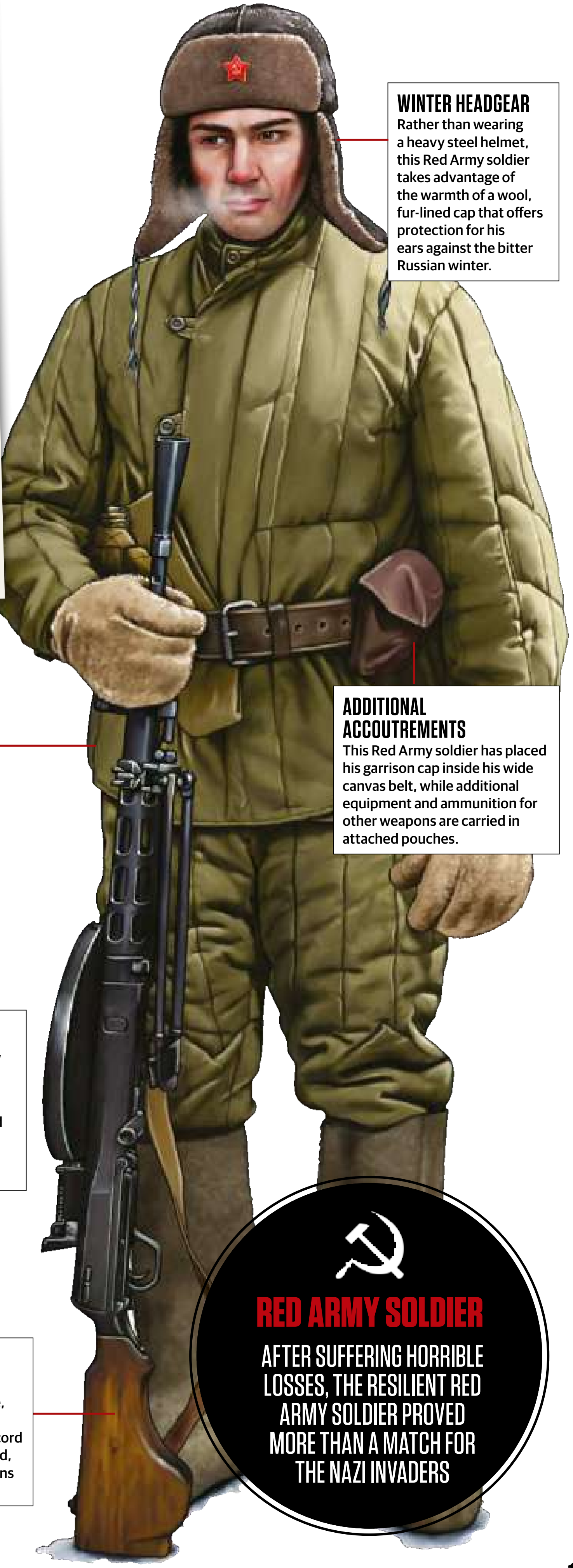
MESS KIT
The German soldier carried his mess kit and bread bag attached to Y-straps or D-ring loops on leather belts. As Barbarossa wore on, hot food was served less frequently in the field.



Axis infantry use a Flammenwerfer 41 to sweep a building clear of resistance

> “Burning villages, staring bodies of fallen Russian soldiers, swollen carcasses of dead horses, rusting, blackened and burnt-out tanks were the signs of the march”
>
> **A GERMAN INFANTRYMAN DESCRIBES THE EARLY DAYS OF BARBAROSSA**

July saw torrential rain drench the battlefields of eastern Europe. It was so severe that the free-roaming Ostheer had been stopped in its tracks and columns of troops tailed back tens of kilometres waiting for the Sun to emerge from the clouds. This gave the beleaguered Red Army a chance to rediscover its composure. The reaction was a counterattack but the Wehrmacht stood firm, beating the Soviets back and advancing ever further towards Smolensk, which fell after a month of heavy fighting. The Germans were suffering substantial losses now but the Wehrmacht juggernaut just kept on coming. Stalin ordered a strict scorched-earth policy. All across the Eastern Front bridges were destroyed, railway lines were sabotaged and roads were demolished. Strong resistance was now a must as the Ostheer drew ever nearer to the cradle of Soviet power. Stalin didn't tolerate failure and General Dmitry Pavlov was duly executed for his failure to prevent the German advance. Now his commanders were much more hesitant to surrender or retreat. While Stalin was purging the Red Army from the top down, the Wehrmacht was busy pillaging the population of Minsk.



WINTER HEADGEAR
Rather than wearing a heavy steel helmet, this Red Army soldier takes advantage of the warmth of a wool, fur-lined cap that offers protection for his ears against the bitter Russian winter.

ADDITIONAL ACCOUTREMENTS
This Red Army soldier has placed his garrison cap inside his wide canvas belt, while additional equipment and ammunition for other weapons are carried in attached pouches.

WINTER UNIFORM
Unlike his German adversary, the Red Army soldier was outfitted for winter warfare with a quilted coat and trousers, fur-lined gloves and thick boots that provided warmth in below-freezing temperatures.

DP-28 LIGHT MACHINE GUN
With its large drum magazine, the DP-28 light machine gun earned the nickname ‘the record player’. Firing a 7.62mm round, it provided automatic weapons support at the squad level.

RED ARMY SOLDIER

AFTER SUFFERING HORRIBLE LOSSES, THE RESILIENT RED ARMY SOLDIER PROVED MORE THAN A MATCH FOR THE NAZI INVADERS

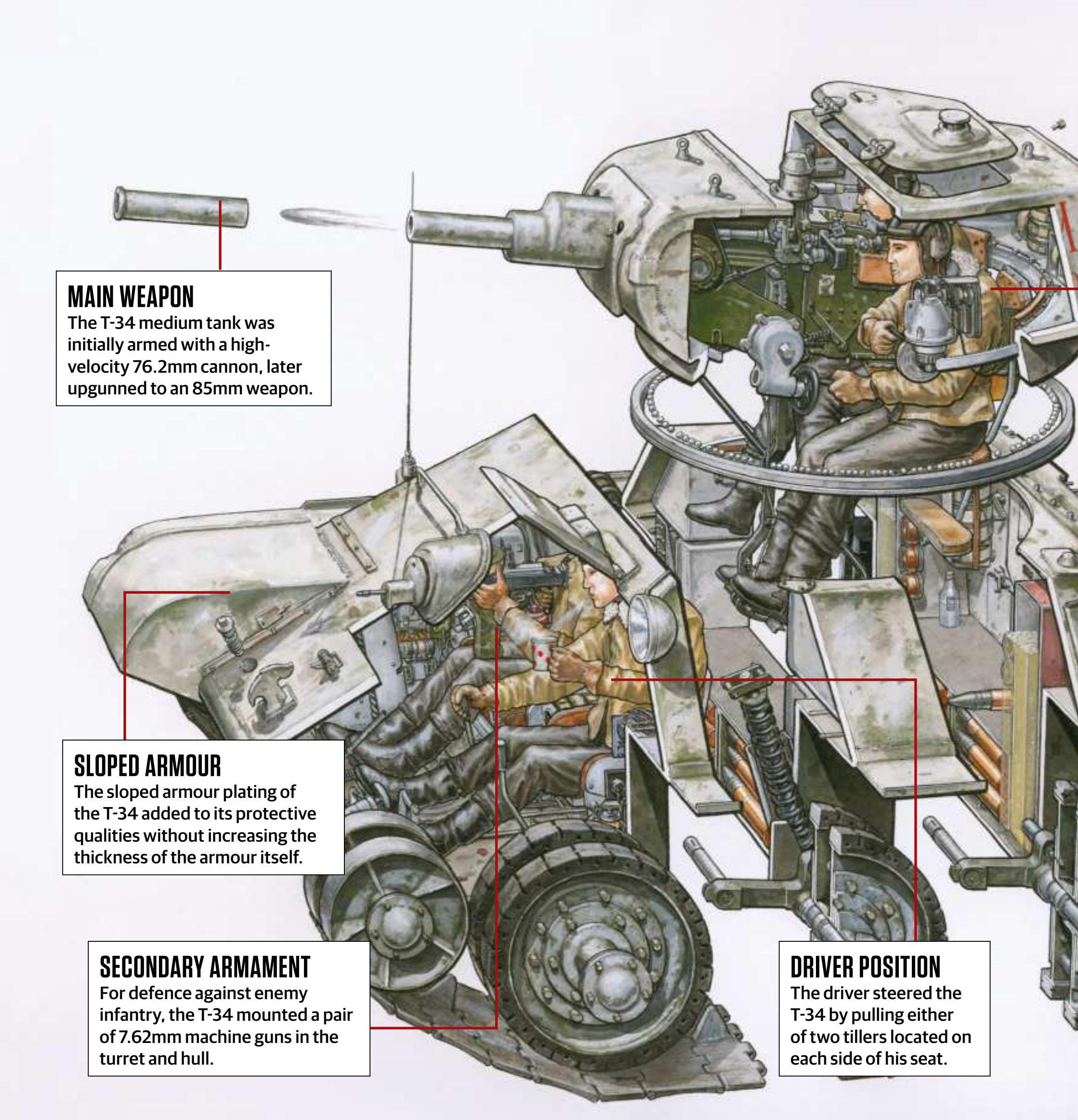
THE HOLOCAUST IN THE EAST

As the front kept expanding, Hitler's vision for an ethnically 'pure' Lebensraum was beginning to be realised behind the lines. Following in the infantry's tracks was the Einsatzgruppen - paramilitary death squads under the command of the SS. They systematically murdered Jews, communist officials and intelligentsia, and Romani and Sinti Gypsies in mass shootings, public hangings and gas trucks, which used the exhaust emissions from motors to choke their victims.

Concentration camps and ghettos were also established, and their inmates used as slave labour. Some of the Wehrmacht command had misgivings but this didn't stop it, and many regular army units, police units, locally raised auxiliaries and fascist militia were complicit in the bloodletting. One of the largest of the mass murders was at Babi Yar on the outskirts of Kiev in September 1941. SS records report a total of 600,000 killed in 1941 alone and the terror outlasted Barbarossa with up to 2 million people being killed by the Einsatzgruppen between 1941 and 1944.

After the close of hostilities, 24 former Einsatzgruppen commanders were charged with crimes against humanity at the Einsatzgruppen Trial, from 1947-48. 14 received death sentences and two received life sentences. The others were given lesser sentences. The ultimate architects of the system, Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler and SS-Obergruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich, both met justice - the former committed suicide in his prison cell while the latter was assassinated in Prague by Allied agents.

> "Is it possible the invaders no longer regard us as human and brand us like cattle? One can not accept such meanness. But who dares oppose them?"
>
> **VILNA RESIDENT MACHA ROLNIKAS WRITING IN HER DIARY IN JUNE 1941**



MAIN WEAPON
The T-34 medium tank was initially armed with a high-velocity 76.2mm cannon, later upgunned to an 85mm weapon.

SLOPED ARMOUR
The sloped armour plating of the T-34 added to its protective qualities without increasing the thickness of the armour itself.

SECONDARY ARMAMENT
For defence against enemy infantry, the T-34 mounted a pair of 7.62mm machine guns in the turret and hull.

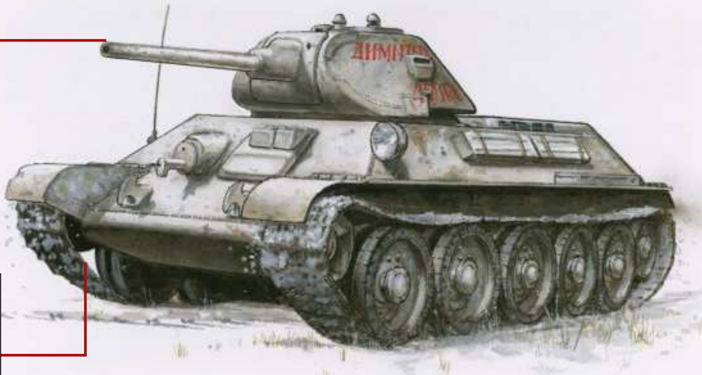
DRIVER POSITION
The driver steered the T-34 by pulling either of two tillers located on each side of his seat.

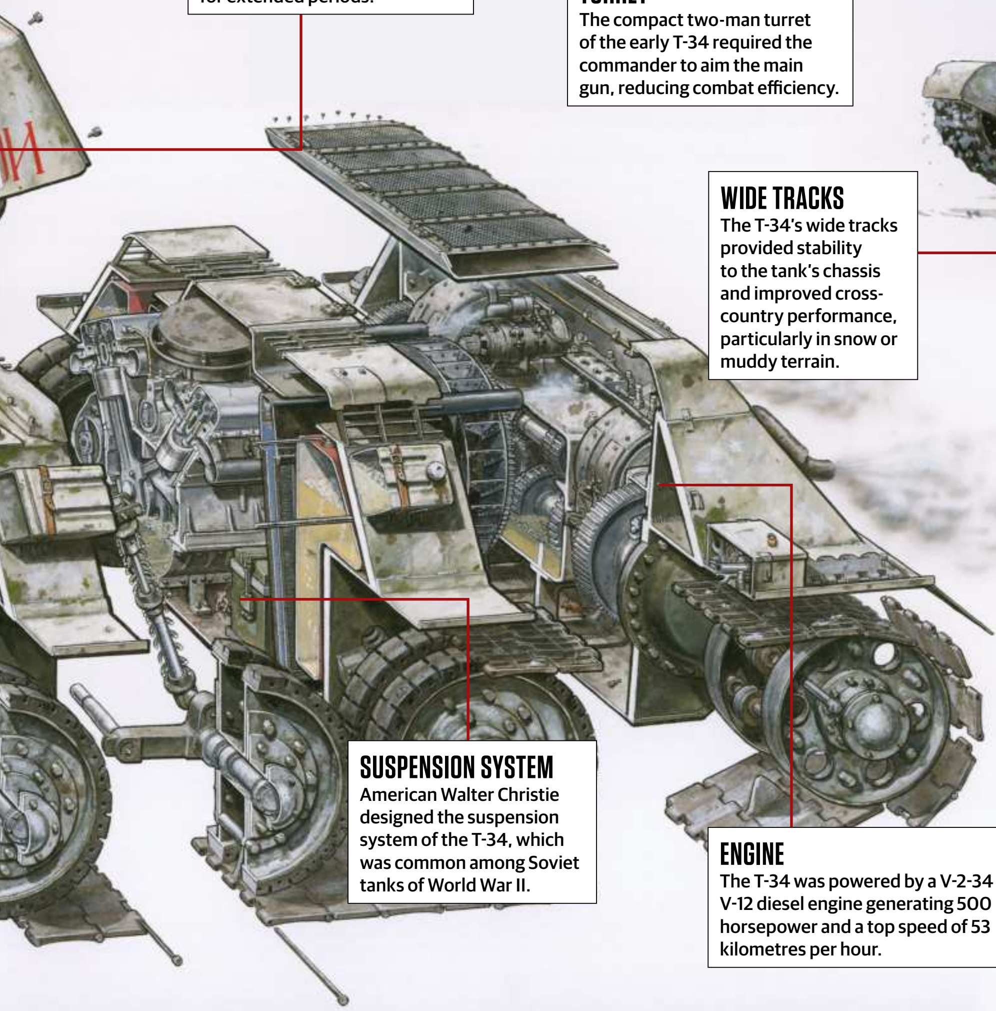
THE ADVANCE FALTERS

The first phase of Barbarossa was over and Hitler and his generals now had to make a judgement call. There were three possible routes that lay ahead: drive on to Moscow, venture north to conquer the birthplace of communism, Leningrad, or turn south and head for the USSR's breadbasket, Ukraine. Hitler, overruling his generals in the process, opted for the latter, reasoning that the oil fields of Baku and the Soviet industry hub at Kharkov were a priority. This would weaken the attacking thrust on Moscow, but the Führer, still completely convinced of his talent as a war leader, believed he knew best. The disagreements rumbled on for the majority of August, as valuable time to completely crush the Soviets was lost. This respite was just what the Red Army needed. By the middle of August, 200 fresh divisions had been brought west, and even if the Germans continued to outthink the Soviets, they would not outnumber them. Despite the oncoming numerical advantage, the ensuing Battle of Kiev was the biggest defeat ever felt by the Red Army in history, and as the Germans took the Uman Pocket, things weren't getting better up north either. The symbolic city of Leningrad had been besieged from mid-September and 300 civilians were dying every day in the former Russian capital, where starvation had seen the population resort to eating cats, dogs and birds. There were even reports of cannibalism.

RED ARMY WORKHORSE

The Soviet T-34 is thought to be the most formidable tank of World War II





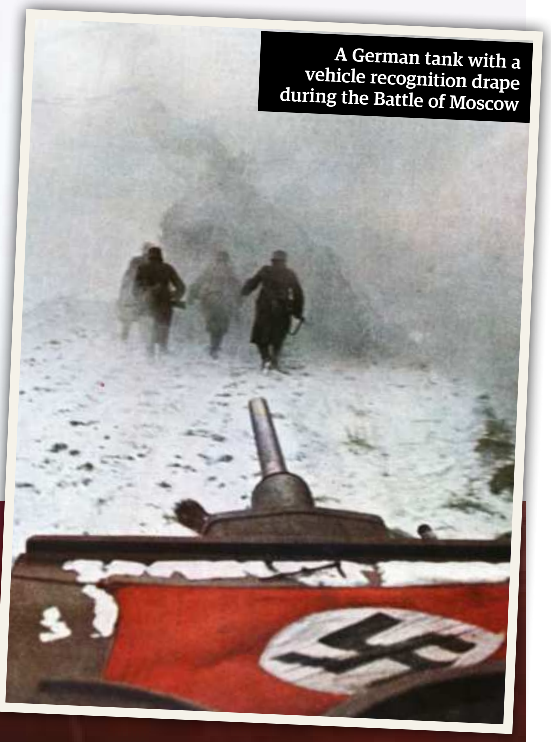
CRAMPED INTERIOR
The interior of the T-34 was not ergonomically ideal as its crew operated in cramped positions for extended periods.

TURRET
The compact two-man turret of the early T-34 required the commander to aim the main gun, reducing combat efficiency.

WIDE TRACKS
The T-34's wide tracks provided stability to the tank's chassis and improved cross-country performance, particularly in snow or muddy terrain.

SUSPENSION SYSTEM
American Walter Christie designed the suspension system of the T-34, which was common among Soviet tanks of World War II.

ENGINE
The T-34 was powered by a V-2-34 V-12 diesel engine generating 500 horsepower and a top speed of 53 kilometres per hour.



A German tank with a vehicle recognition drape during the Battle of Moscow

OPERATION TYPHOON

After the successes in both the north and south, it was time for the Ostheer to deliver the killing blow: Moscow. The assault got under way in October as Vyazma, a town 200 kilometres south of Moscow, was taken. The victories just kept coming as Kalinin and Bryansk also fell. Moscow was nearing. In the city, the scene was one of panic. Two million people had fled the capital and the Soviet government had been relocated to Kuybyshev (now Samara) 800 kilometres to the east. One man who didn't quake in his boots was Georgy Zhukov. With Imperial Japan no longer posing a threat to the Soviet Far East – thanks in part to his critical victory at Khalkhin Gol in 1939 – he mobilised 900,000 recruits from the eastern military districts to combat the Germans in the west. The Ostheer were just 65 kilometres from the gates of Moscow and could see the light of anti-aircraft fire over the city, but they were unable to advance any further. The Soviet strategy was now to attack the energy-sapped and sleep-deprived Germans as much as possible, using the fresh troops, with adverse weather giving the Red Army plenty of time to regroup and consolidate its positions. Now a long way from Berlin, German intelligence began to falter. High Command severely underestimated the amount of troops the USSR could call on and their prediction of 50 reserve Red Army divisions was woefully inadequate. By mid-November, the Rasputitsa autumn rains had ceased and the muddy quagmire had hardened, allowing large-scale offensives to recommence. The Germans were now in Moscow's suburbs and could see the Kremlin. The heat of battle was fierce as the Red Army fought tooth and nail for the salvation of their capital. Something had to give, and it did, as the coldest winter for 140 years gripped the Soviet Union.

> "For all military purposes Soviet Russia is done with. The British dream of a two-front war is dead"
>
> **COMMANDER OF THE SS PANZER DIVISION, SEPP DIETTRICH, 9 OCTOBER 1941**

A Wehrmacht soldier keeps an eye out for unexpected Russian attacks

GENERAL FROST

The Soviets were prepared for the sub-zero temperatures, equipped with padded winter clothing and specialist units – including ski troops and sleds for transporting guns and artillery. The Germans, meanwhile, had nothing of the sort. Hitler's confidence of a swift victory meant that few of the soldiers had winter clothing to keep the frost at bay and the results were devastating. Guns jammed and gloved fingers struggled to work them loose, rations froze with stews turning to hunks of ice, engines seized up for want of antifreeze, and intense blizzards grounded the Luftwaffe. The frostbite was so bad that 14,000 soldiers had their limbs amputated and the Ostheer's supply train, which was overly dependent on horses, was crippled. The Red Army counterattack on 5 December hit hard as 88 Soviet divisions ploughed into German lines over an 800-kilometre front. This crushed the resolve of the already weary Germans but Hitler was not one to admit defeat and ordered von Bock to hold his ground. The decision was pigheaded at best and represented the Führer's overconfidence as a general. The Red Army advance initiated a series of losses for the Wehrmacht, enraging Hitler. Von Rundstedt, von Brauchitsch and von Bock were all relieved of their duties as Hitler shuffled his pack. Günther von Kluge was promoted to field marshal while Hitler himself took over as supreme commander. The changes didn't have the desired effect and a tactical retreat was ordered as the panzer divisions withdrew 322 kilometres west to the starting place of Operation Typhoon. Barbarossa had failed.

> "The wind stabs you in the face with needles and blasts through your protective headgear and your gloves. Your eyes are streaming so much you can hardly see a thing"

THE LAKE LADOGA LIFELINE

Hitler coveted Leningrad as it was the symbolic centre of communism – the heart of the October Revolution of 1917 – and its successful invasion would be an ideological victory. Rail and land connections to the rest of the USSR were severed on 30 August as Nazi command decided to besiege the city. The only chance for Leningrad lay in Lake Lagoda, which was already providing a natural barrier, dividing German and Finnish co-belligerents. The lake froze over in November 1941 allowing lorries to transport supplies into the city, providing relief. The incoming resources from the ice road weren't enough to completely sustain the city but the natural highway helped keep the city alive until it was liberated in January 1944 after more than 900 days of siege.

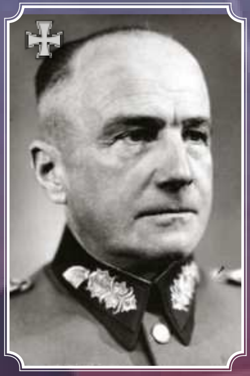
Below: For its citizens' immense bravery and stamina, Leningrad was named a hero city by the Soviet government in 1945

BARBAROSSA GENERALS

The opposing German and Soviet commanders committed millions of men and vast resources to one of the largest clashes of arms the world had ever seen

ADOLF HITLER

As early as the 1920s, Hitler made public his vision for the German people to find Lebensraum, or living space, in the east. Believing that Russia could not withstand the Nazi onslaught, the Führer launched Operation Barbarossa. It was a decision that would doom the Third Reich.



WALTHER VON BRAUCHITSCH

Commander in chief of the German Army during the early years of WWII, Field Marshal von Brauchitsch supported Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union. However, von Brauchitsch fell into disfavour when German forces failed to capture Moscow.

FEDOR VON BOCK

Field Marshal Fedor von Bock commanded Army Group Centre during Barbarossa. He opposed Hitler's alterations to the original Wehrmacht plan to drive directly against Moscow rather than attempting encirclements of Red Army troops and capturing Minsk and other cities prior to the advance on the capital.

JOSEF STALIN

After the nations signed a non-aggression pact in 1939 and co-operated during the invasion of Poland, Premier Josef Stalin naively refused to believe intelligence reports suggesting that Hitler and the Nazi war machine were preparing to invade the Soviet Union on a front more than 1,600 kilometres long.

GEORGY ZHUKOV

Although his earliest counteroffensive operations against the invading German Army ended in failure, Marshal Georgy Zhukov remained a central figure in the Red Army effort to stem the Nazi tide and in the eventual victory during the Great Patriotic War, as the Soviets called World War II.

ALEKSANDR VASILEVSKY

A high-ranking member of the Red Army general staff, Marshal Vasilevsky was responsible for planning much of the defensive effort around Moscow in the autumn of 1941 as well as many aspects of the Soviet counteroffensive that ultimately led to victory.

GERMANY'S ALLIES

The smaller nations thrown into the meat grinder between Hitler and Stalin

FINLAND

Finland had been embroiled in border disputes with the Soviet Union prior to Barbarossa. The two nations had been battling it out on the Karelian Isthmus since 1939 and Hitler saw the chance for an alliance. On the same day as Barbarossa, the Finnish Army, although not technically part of the Axis, began an assault on the Isthmus north of Leningrad. Even after Barbarossa ended, the Continuation War lasted until 1944.

ROMANIA

Hitler was keen for an alliance with Romania as it granted him access to extra oil reserves and the second largest contribution of troops to Barbarossa. The troops joined up with Army Group South but found their ability in battle was often castigated by Wehrmacht generals. Regardless, they were instrumental in the push on Odessa and the Crimea, but when the USSR pushed west, the Romanian Army was in no position to resist.

ITALY

After the joint invasion of Greece and the Balkans, Mussolini was keen to assist his German ally. An expeditionary force of 62,000 troops was raised but, like the Germans, they were unprepared for the frozen climate. The Italian Eighth Army supported the Wehrmacht throughout the campaign but turned out to be no match for the Red Army. Tens of thousands of POWs were captured to suffer in Soviet prison camps.

HUNGARY

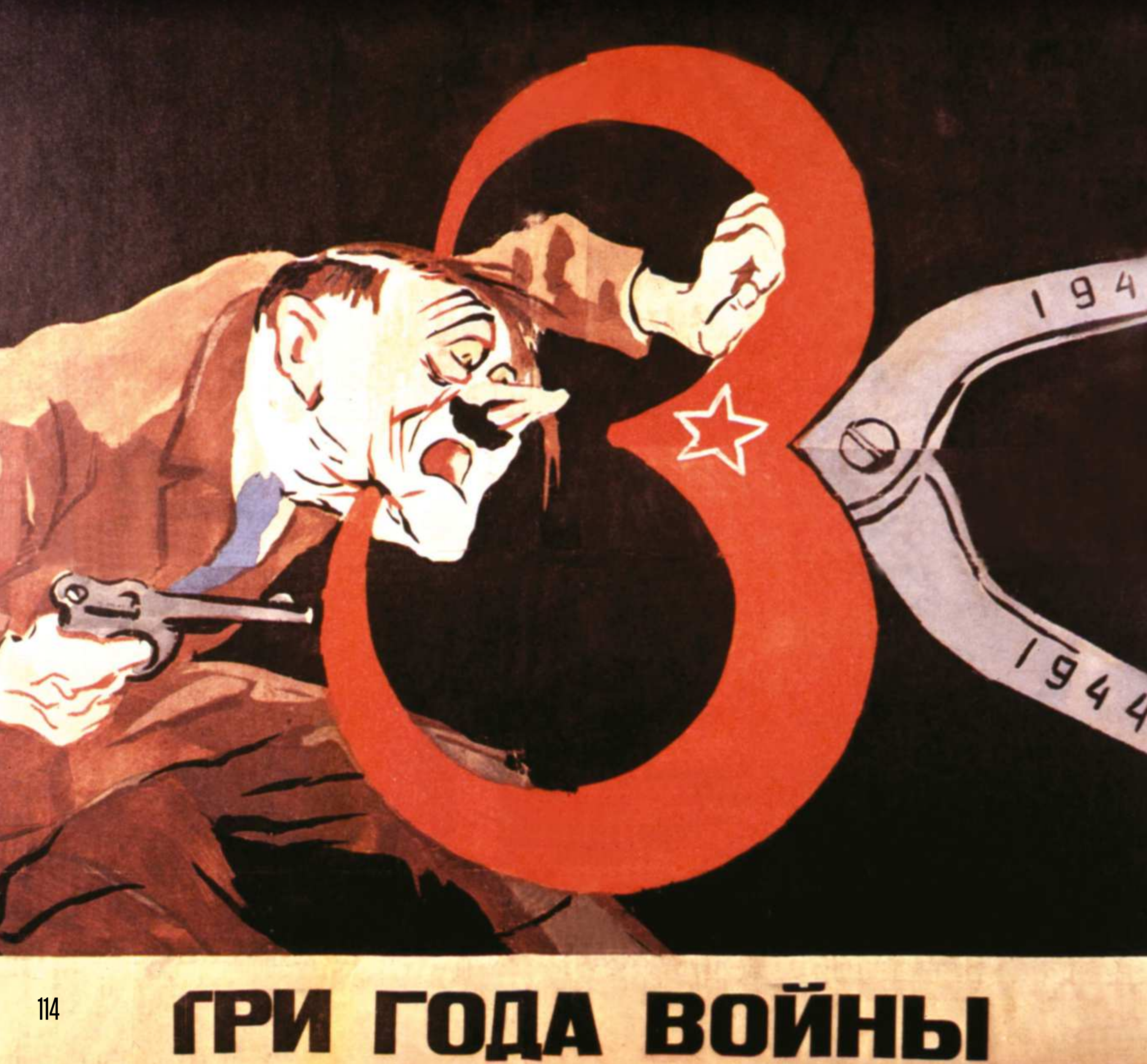
Linked to Germany through their alliance with the old Austro-Hungarian Empire, Hungary was given territory in Romania and Yugoslavia as a way of goading them into the war. Despite this, the Hungarians were hesitant to commit soldiers and contributed less than other Axis states. Their sudden capitulation in 1944 in the face of the Red Army advance saw Hitler install a puppet regime to try to stymie the Soviet fight back.

SLOVAK REPUBLIC

The Slovak Republic was established in 1939 as a client state to Nazi Germany. As a puppet state, it was forced to submit to German direction. The Slovakian Expeditionary Army Group sent 45,000 men to aid the Wehrmacht but could not keep up as it lacked vehicles to match the fast-moving panzer formations. Their morale declined as the war went on so the majority of its divisions were turned into purely construction battalions.

"They are everywhere pushing through the wide gaps that have opened up in our front. The retreat in snow and ice is absolutely Napoleonic in its manner. The losses are the same"

GENERAL GOTTHARD HEINRICI, WHO SERVED IN THE FOURTH ARMY UNDER VON KLUGE, 22 DECEMBER 1941

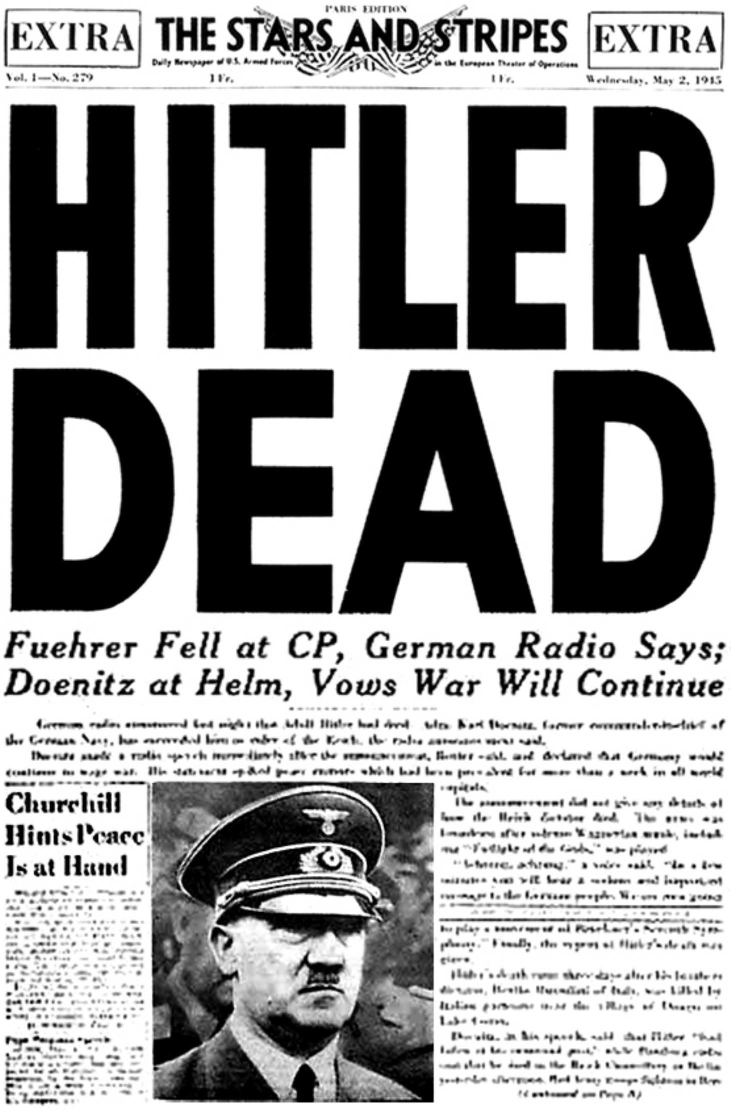


WHY HITLER LOST

Despite the Nazi war machine's initial victories as the armoured spearheads of Operation Barbarossa struck deep across the expanse of Russia, killing or capturing millions of Red Army soldiers, Adolf Hitler had failed to reckon with several salient points that condemned the Wehrmacht to defence, decline and defeat on the Eastern Front.

Expecting a rapid advance to victory, Hitler underestimated the resolve of his communist enemy and the steely, ruthless determination of Josef Stalin once the Soviet Union was plunged into war. As the Germans marched from victory to victory, overconfidence gripped the Führer and his senior commanders. However, by the autumn of 1941, the situation had begun to take on a different character. While Hitler meddled with the conduct of the offensive both strategically and tactically, Red Army counterattacks and then seemingly endless rain, mud and snow combined to slow the Nazi tide. For the German soldier, an ill wind blew across Russia with the winter of 1941. Often with nothing more substantial than their summer uniforms to protect against the bitter cold, men were incapacitated or simply froze to death. Engines and weapons became inoperable. A mechanised army ground to a chilling halt. Panzer commanders peered through field glasses at the domes of Moscow fewer than 20 kilometres away.

When Hitler turned his tanks towards Stalingrad and the oil fields of the Caucasus the following summer, only death and destruction awaited his Sixth Army and the once seemingly invincible Wehrmacht formations. Eventually an inexorable wave of Soviet retribution roared across Eastern Europe and into the streets of Berlin. On the Eastern Front, Hitler's reach had exceeded his grasp, revealing the Führer's destiny to die, along with his dream of world domination, amid the rubble of his capital city.



PARIS EDITION

EXTRA **THE STARS AND STRIPES** EXTRA

Daily Newspaper of U.S. Armed Forces in the European Theater of Operations

Vol. 1—No. 279 1 Fr. 1 Fr. Wednesday, May 2, 1945

HITLER DEAD

Fuehrer Fell at CP, German Radio Says; Doenitz at Helm, Vows War Will Continue

Churchill Hints Peace Is at Hand

A special edition of *The Stars And Stripes*, a newspaper for US soldiers, reports on Hitler's death

THE SHEER SCALE OF OPERATION BARBAROSSA

134 DIVISIONS at full fighting strength

+73 DIVISIONS for deployment behind the front

3.5 MILLION GERMAN TROOPS

300,000 FINNS

1 MILLION GERMAN ALLIED TROOPS

50,000 SLOVAKIAN TROOPS

250,000 ROMANIANS

THE GERMANS HAD

3,580 TANKS

2,700 AIRCRAFT

500,000 TRUCKS

7,184 GUNS

The capture of Kiev took

665,000 PRISONERS

884 TANKS

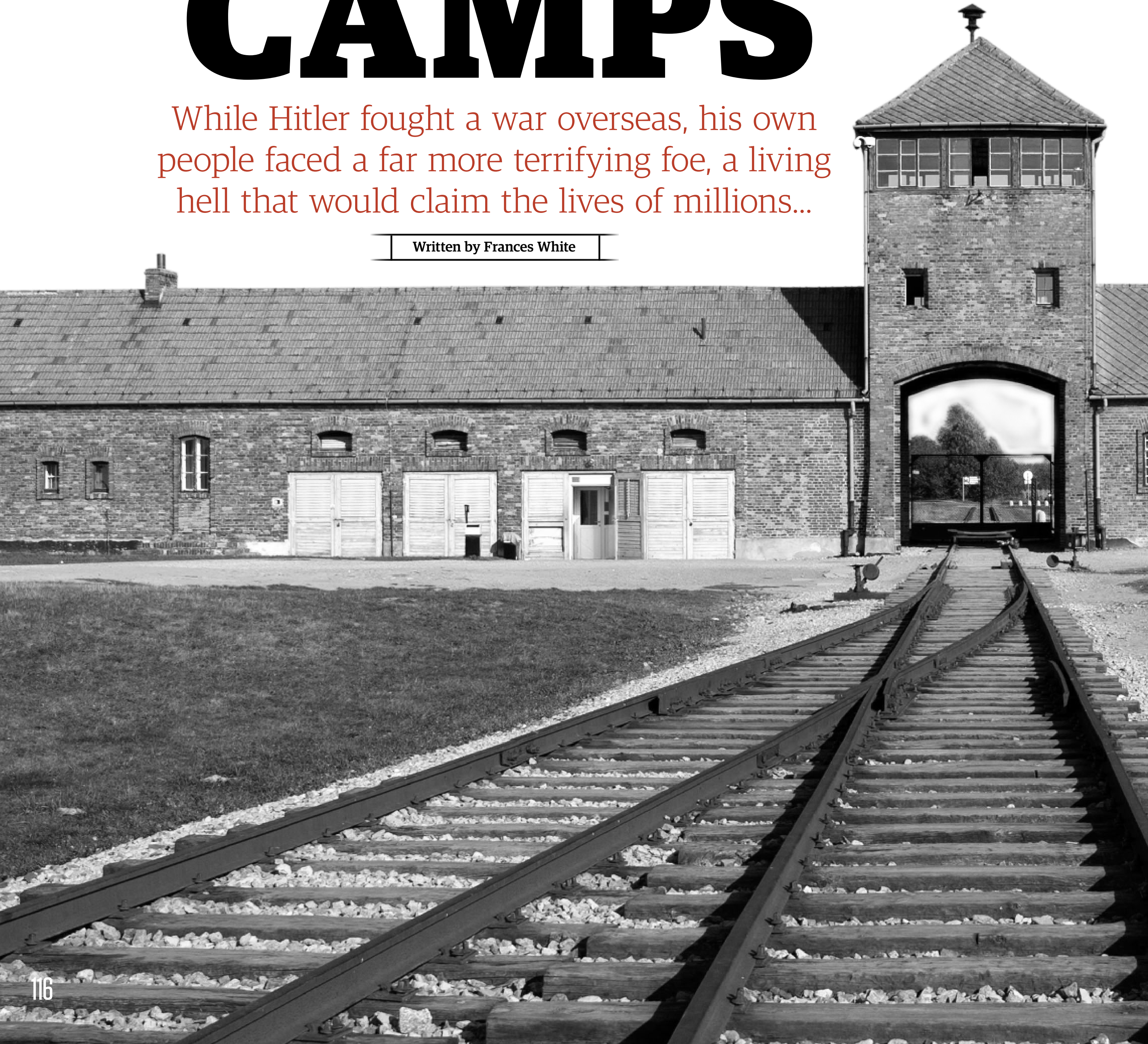
3,000 GUNS

80% of all German combat deaths occurred on the Eastern Front

HITLER'S DEATH CAMPS

While Hitler fought a war overseas, his own people faced a far more terrifying foe, a living hell that would claim the lives of millions…

Written by Frances White



Since 1945, more than 44 million people from the furthest reaches of the planet have visited Auschwitz. A sombre, silent world of barbed wire, railway sidings, cold barracks and a dirty, rusted crematorium, Auschwitz today stands as a well preserved memory of everything that occurred there. It is an uncomfortable memory, one the majority would like to forget, yet is vital that all remember. At the time, Auschwitz was only one of many, but today it serves as a symbol of extermination, a warning of the darkest reaches of evil, and a reminder to, at all costs, avoid repeating the mistakes of the past.

Concentration camps, or variations of them, were a constant part of Hitler's rule. The very first camps were created as soon as Hitler was appointed chancellor of Germany in 1933. These detainment camps were intended for political opponents of the Nazi Party. By ridding himself of anyone he believed to be a threat by throwing them in these camps, Hitler was able to consolidate power and rule largely unopposed. Due to the growing number of people arrested, more camps were needed and were built throughout Germany. By 1934, the camps were controlled by one central administration, and by the end of that year the SS were the only agency with the authority to run them. By the time Germany invaded Poland in 1939 there were six of these camps. Although they involved imprisonment and forced labour, they did not yet carry out the brutal task for which they would one day become infamous - mass murder.

Hitler's plan to eliminate the Jewish population, the Final Solution, did not occur overnight. Instead the process of dehumanisation began very early in his rule. He introduced the Nuremberg Laws in 1935, which made it illegal for Germans to marry or have sex with Jews. The laws also took away the Jews' German citizenship, and most of their rights. Propaganda films were pumped out to convince the population of their immortality, and how the Jews' genetic makeup defined them as parasites. In 1938, the 'Night of Broken Glass' saw Nazis looting and burning synagogues, hospitals, schools, homes and Jewish businesses all over Germany. Jews were expelled from their homes and forced into ghettos. By this stage most regarded Jews as subhuman, and the Jews were terrified into submission by the brutality they had experienced. Afraid, alone and with no rights, it was the perfect storm for Hitler to execute his Final Solution.

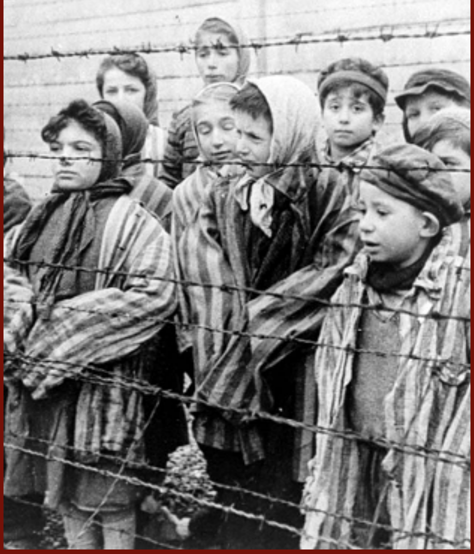
The camps specifically designed for extermination were built after the Wannsee Conference in early 1942, where the goal of

> "Hitler's plan to eliminate the Jewish population, did not occur overnight. Instead the process of dehumanisation began very early in his rule"

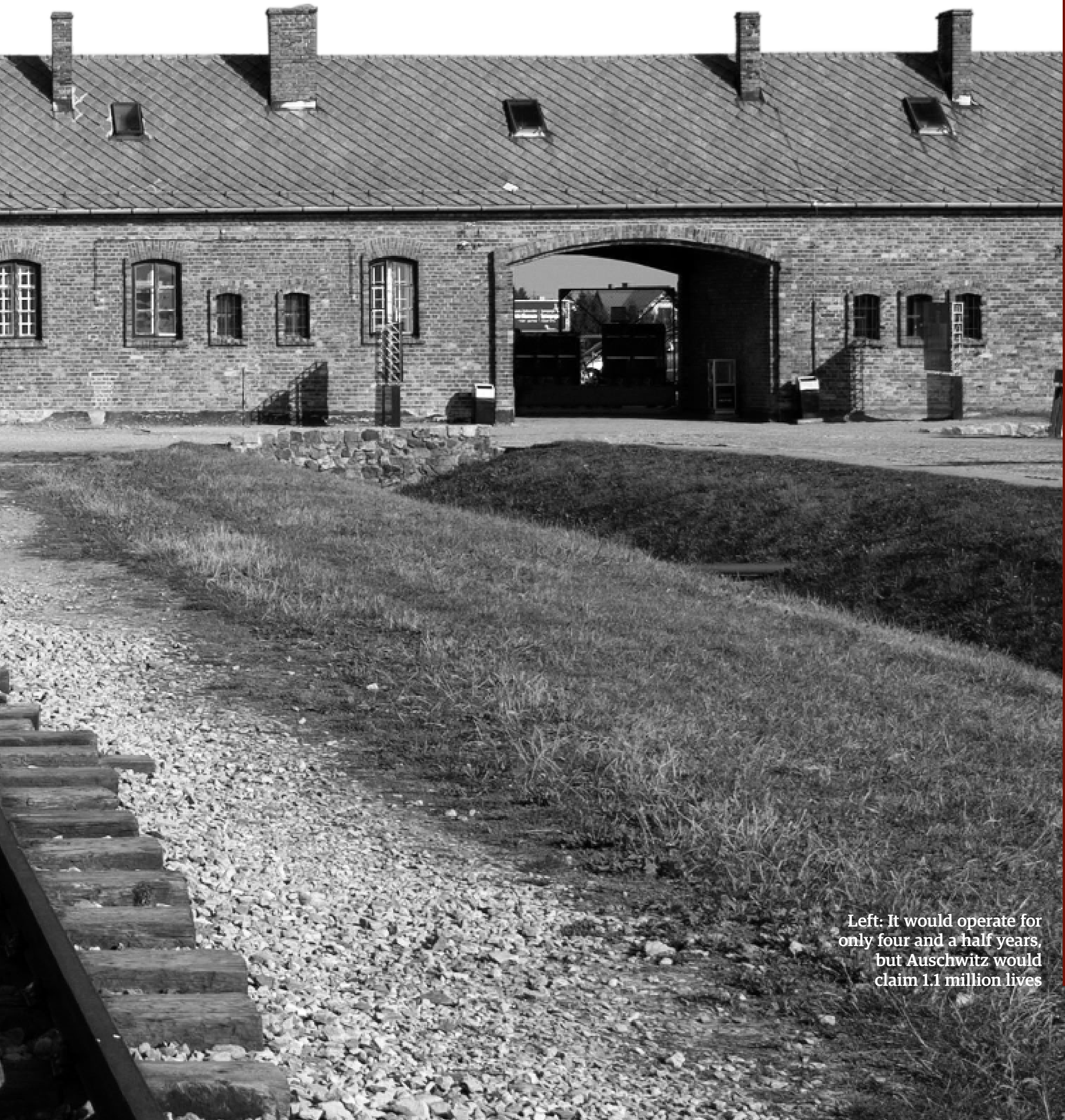
NAZI EXPERIMENTS

Another horrific aspect of the death camps was human experimentation. Many doctors and physicians were drawn by the chance to conduct twisted experiments that would not usually be permitted, and the fate of many of their patients was worse than death. Some of the experiments would involve exposing the body to extreme conditions like freezing temperatures or atmospheric pressure, just to see how they would react. Healthy inmates were infected with diseases such as malaria or tuberculosis in order to test immunisation methods. Another experiment concerned blood clotting, where the subjects were given a substance to see how it would affect it, then were shot through the chest or neck, or even had their limbs amputated without anaesthesia.

Other experiments seemed to only satisfy the doctors' sick desires. Josef Mengele, for example, was fascinated with twins and he would conduct horrific acts upon them, such as sewing four-year-old twins together in order to make them conjoined, their suffering was only ended by their parents managing to sneak them morphine to kill them. Known as the 'Angel of Death' Mengele would trick the children into trusting them by giving them sweets and toys before maiming, paralysing and murdering them. In one particularly horrific experiment, nursing babies were taken from their mothers just to see how long they could survive without feeding. As far as the doctors were concerned, the concentration camps not only gave them free rein to conduct their experiments, but also provided a constant, ample supply of subjects who couldn't say no.



Above: These Jewish twins were some of the few children to survive Auschwitz, as they were kept alive for Mengele's experiments



Left: It would operate for only four and a half years, but Auschwitz would claim 1.1 million lives exterminating all Jews was decided upon, and was given the name Operation Reinhard. Responsibility for executing this fell to Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi lieutenant colonel who had arranged the movement of Jews into ghettos. Three centres designed primarily for killing were established in Poland: Bełzec, Sobibór and Treblinka. Auschwitz II was also designed as an extermination camp.

Auschwitz was by far the biggest and most organised of the camps. It comprised three separate camps, a death camp, Birkenau, a forced labour camp and a concentration camp. Covering over 30.5 square kilometres it was guarded by approximately 6,000 men and would go on to claim more than 1.25 million lives. The huge killing centre at Birkenau was the largest of the Nazi system, and served as the centrepiece of the extermination. There were several pure death camps that were, by comparison, quite small at only a few hundred metres long, and designed for quick and 'efficient' killing. Treblinka, for example, was located in sparsely populated woodland, the perfect place for concealing murders.

The first trains carrying prisoners arrived in Birkenau in March 1942. However, the trauma began long before the prisoners arrived. The journey consisted of the men, women and children being forced to travel in cramped windowless cattle wagons, some so packed there was only room to stand. There was no water, food, toilet facilities or even ventilation. Perhaps worst of all was the lack of control, the prisoners had no idea where they were going, or how long the traumatic journey would last. Many people died of starvation or suffocation before they even reached the camp, and those still alive were forced to share their wagons with rotting corpses. The longest journey lasted a horrific 18 days, and when the doors were opened the SS discovered piles of lifeless bodies.

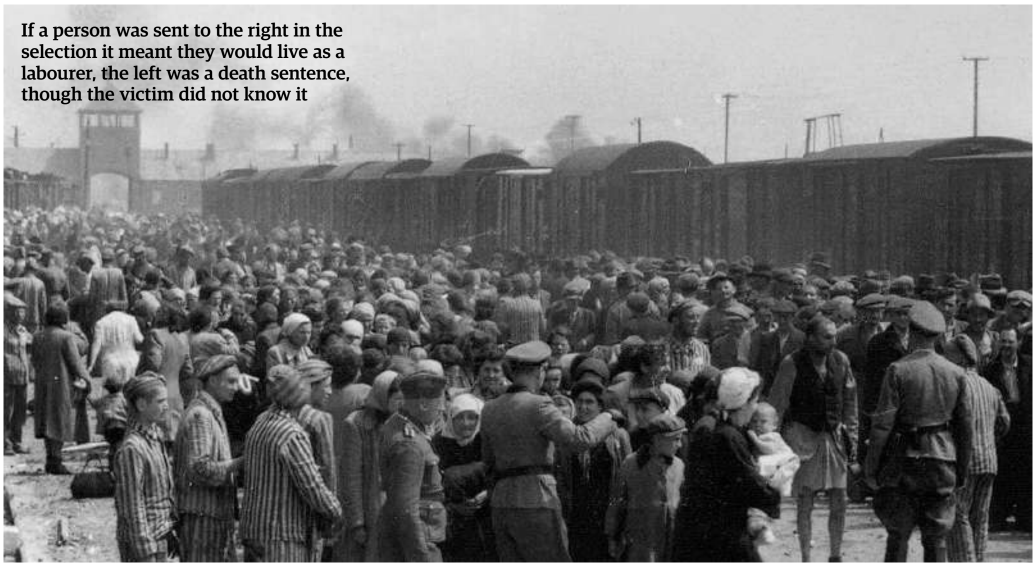
Those who arrived at the death camps were told it was a holding facility and they would continue their journey soon. In fact, the only prisoners that survived these camps were the 'lucky' few able-bodied selected to remove and bury the corpses killed in the gas chambers. At all camps, the people were forced to leave their belongings and were gathered outside for a selection process. First, they were divided by gender and then an SS guard would assess their fitness. Small children, pregnant women, the sick and handicapped were the first to be condemned to death. The Nazis had little use for them, as they could not labour in the camps. Most women with small children were also given a death sentence, as separating them would have caused a commotion, and above anything the camp runners wished to maintain the order and efficiency of their operation. Those who were over 14 and were deemed 'fit' for work were sent to the other side of the loading ramp, almost always this involved splitting up families who had no idea they would never see their loved ones again.

Jewish women in Budapest captured and escorted away. A tenth of the Jewish victims were Hungarian

Cargo trains were used to transport victims to the death camps. Many didn't survive the journey

This photo shows the crematorium at the German concentration camp Weimar, bones of anti-Nazi German women can still be seen within

Above: Jews were required to identify themselves by wearing a yellow star in public, this was part of the process of dehumanisation



If a person was sent to the right in the selection it meant they would live as a labourer, the left was a death sentence, though the victim did not know it

> "Grim, prolonged suffering awaited. The fit inmates would be completely undressed, then shaved of their body hair and tattooed with the now-infamous registration numbers"

The Nazis were very concerned with achieving the most efficient killing process. They had conducted multiple experiments and lots of research into determining the most effective way of dispatching their victims; one that would ensure everyone died, that nobody escaped, and that nobody would realise what was happening until it was too late. The method they eventually settled on in most of the camps was gassing. While carbon monoxide was originally used, the insecticide Zyklon B was developed and found to be more effective. To maintain the façade of safety, the victims were told to undress to be 'washed and disinfected', and often Jewish prisoners were used as part of this process, helping their kinsmen to undress to calm their nerves. Any children that cried were comforted by a 'Special Detachment' team of Jewish people, and there were many reports of children walking into the chambers laughing and singing as they clutched their toys. Notices such as 'Cleanliness brings freedom!' were hung above the chamber doors, and SS men dressed as doctors even examined the victims before the gassing. However, this was only to mark the prisoners who had gold teeth which they could later extract.

The doors were sealed and the gas would enter the chamber via pellets of Zyklon B which were dropped into vents. The gas would slowly rise from the bottom up, filling the space with toxic gas. As the victims struggled to breathe they would trample and fight to reach the ceiling, and often when the doors were open, the bodies would be found piled atop each other, with the strongest at the top. It was far from a peaceful execution, and many witnesses reported being able to hear the victims screaming and pleading for their lives. They were found with blood seeping from their ears and foam from their mouths.

One of the biggest problems the Nazis faced with their mass killings was corpse disposal. Initially the victims' bodies were buried in mass graves, but due to the sheer number this became inefficient, so instead they were cremated. The corpses were loaded into fiery pits which were also operated by prisoners from the Special Detachment team. These men would stoke the fire, turn the corpses and drain the excess fat which seeped out, well aware that they, too, would one day meet the same fate. Because the killing at Auschwitz was on a much larger scale, crematoria were created, and the ashes were buried in the ground or dumped in the river. Although the SS members wished to maintain a façade of relative safety, even they were unable to mask the horrific, putrid smell of burning human flesh which rose from the crematoria.

For those few lucky enough to escape instant extermination, grim, prolonged suffering awaited. The fit inmates would be undressed, then shaved of their body hair and tattooed with the now-infamous registration numbers. They then would be disinfected and scalded or frozen with boiling or freezing showers. Afterwards they would be dressed in striped pyjamas and a pair of uncomfortable wooden clogs, rarely in their actual size, and all aspects of individuality or freedom stripped away.

Although Auschwitz-Birkenau in particular masqueraded as a work camp, with slogans such as 'Arbeit macht frei', or 'Work sets you free' emblazoned on archways, the Nazi concentration camps never intended to release the vast majority of their victims. The intent instead was death through labour, exhaustion, starvation and disease. Those who were spared the gas chambers when they arrived had not been given a new chance of life, but a slower, prolonged death.

The Nazis did everything to ensure that these deaths would come. They created wooden or brick barracks, intended to house 40 prisoners, but often more than 700 would be cramped within. There were not proper beds, but straw-filled mattresses spread over wooden bunks, earth floors and next to no sanitary facilities. Although the barracks did have stoves, there was no fuel provided. They were dirty, cramped and freezing, a breeding ground for disease. The winters were especially brutal, and many prisoners died shivering in the plummeting Polish temperatures.

Beyond the barracks themselves the sanitary facilities for prisoners were not only poor, but dangerous. Initially there was no water at all for the inmates to wash themselves or keep clean. When water was finally introduced, it was filthy and riddled with disease. The inmates had no choice but to use it; despite how dirty and stinking it was, washing daily gave the inmates some remnant of a life that was real, and some memory of civilisation - if that was lost, their enemies would have won.

There was certainly no memory of civilisation in the brutal daily routines the prisoners were forced to go through, in fact they were designed to beat every sense of worth and purpose out of them, until all that remained was a husk of what was once a person. Prisoners were awoken at dawn, after having very little sleep. They were forced to stand still in their thin, ragged clothing through all weathers for hours on end as they were counted. Anyone too weak to stand would be taken away to be executed. Roll call was repeated in the evening, and was often a chance for the officers to punish prisoners who had not worked hard enough, were resisting or showing weakness. They were used to demonstrate to the others what would happen if they stepped out of line, the punishment was always brutal and violent, and more often than not ended in death. It was a daily reminder of how expendable each and every one of them was.

Work within the camp varied depending on the person, the most desirable placement was within the SS offices themselves, filing or administration roles usually filled by women with education. However, due to their lack of protection and rights, this often resulted in sexual exploitation and rape. Most were forced into physical labour, backbreaking factory work, construction projects, or on farms or in coal mines. A lot of the tasks the inmates were given were pointless and humiliating, and they were very rarely provided the proper equipment. For example, Ben Stern, a camp survivor, spoke of a job he was given to carry steel beams in the freezing winter. 20 men were lifting each side of the massive beam, and they were told to place it somewhere. However, when they tried to they were unable as their skin was frozen to the metal. The skin was torn from their hands and began bleeding. The very next day they were forced to carry the same beam back to the original spot. It was this kind of repetitive, pointless labour that was designed to break the people's spirits and erase all sense of self-worth or strength to fight back.

The exhaustion brought on by the relentless labour was not helped by the inadequate food given to the inmates. The meals were never

Above: These slave labours interned at the Buchenwald concentration camp were on average found to weigh around 32 kilograms

NAZI EXPERIMENTS

The suffering of those who managed to survive the death camps didn't end when they were liberated, and some didn't desire a quiet, peaceful life, they lusted after one thing only – revenge. Calling themselves the Nakam, and also known as 'The Avengers', a group of approximately 60 Jews, many of whom were Holocaust survivors grouped together and arrived in Germany to hunt their chosen prey – Nazis. While many of the prominent leaders of the camps had been punished, many Nazis involved in the running of the camps were allowed to wander freely and continue their lives, and the Avengers did not like this.

The group would first identify Nazis, then stage an arrest under the guise of military police, and take the offender away. Then the Jews would enact their revenge, sometimes the Nazis would be strangled, others hanged, in order to mask the murder as a suicide. Nazis were also found in ditches, the supposed victims of hit and runs, or car accidents which occurred due to freak mechanical failures.

One huge operation involved a member obtaining a job as a baker at a detention centre for former SS members where he poisoned over 3,000 loaves, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of men. However, this bread poisoning was only plan B to the original mass murder scheme of poisoning the water supplies of five German cities. The intention was to kill 6 million Germans, a German life for every Jewish life. Luckily, the plan was foiled when one of the members, loaded with canisters of poison was discovered by British police. Because the Avengers were so discreet, we have no idea how many Nazis met their end through the group, but their message was clear – we have not forgiven or forgotten.

"We have no idea how many Nazis they killed, but their message was clear – we have not forgiven or forgotten"

Above: The Avengers were formed by Abba Kovner, a Lithuanian Jew who, during the war, released a manifesto with the famous phrase "Let us not go like lambs to the slaughter!"

Jews who sought asylum elsewhere were often denied, the refugees on MS St. Louis were turned away from Cuba, Canada and the US

substantial, and never provided enough calories for the physical exertion their bodies were under. Breakfast usually consisted of imitation coffee and lunch was soup, however this was watery with nothing in it to eat, sometimes it was simply water warmed up in a metal tin. A thin slice of bread with a tiny slice of sausage or margarine was given in the evening to last until the morning. The lack of food was so prevalent and debilitating that many prisoners starved to death, losing pounds of muscle mass and tissue until they resembled living skeletons. Those prisoners who were quick enough would steal the bread or boots off dead bodies, then use them to trade for something that might aid their own survival, like a place to sleep, or a chance to wash themselves.

All of this exhaustion, pain and hunger combined with the random cullings, and the constant spectre of the crematoria towers pumping out smoke had the exact effect the Nazis desired, and people died in their hundreds of thousands. Many were the victims of starvation and disease, but there were many, enough to earn a nickname, that completely gave up hope. Muselmann (a slang term based on the German word for 'Muslim') were victims who would squat with their legs tucked in, their shoulders curved and their heads down, completely and utterly overcome with despair, and given up all hope of survival. Holocaust survivor Primo Levi wrote that if he could "enclose all the evil of our time in one image, I would choose this image."

However, not everyone surrendered all hope. There were many who resisted, whether it was simply by continuing to practise their faith or even writing diaries and secretly hiding them to tell of the horrors that happened within. There were also incidents of physical resistance. One woman seized a gun from an SS officer and shot two of them while undressing in the crematorium, another group of Polish prisoners escaped while building a drainage ditch. One of the most remarkable acts of rebellion was when 250 Special Detachment Jews set fire to a crematorium, cut through the fence and reached the outside. Though they were all killed, they took three guards down with them and the crematorium was never used again.

Between May 1940 and January 1945, 1.3 million prisoners were transported to Auschwitz alone; of these, 90 per cent were executed on arrival. The Allies and those in the free world had received information about the Holocaust, but the whole horrific picture of what was truly occurring did not become clear until they were liberated. In late 1944, with the approaching Red Army, Hitler planned to conceal all that had occurred within the camps. The gassings stopped, documents were destroyed and buildings were burned down or dismantled. Those healthy enough to walk, approximately 58,000, were ordered to evacuate by foot to Loslau, some 63 kilometres away. The exhausted men and women were forced to walk through freezing conditions, many without shoes, and any who fell or were too slow were shot. Some 15,000 prisoners died on this horrific death march.

When the Soviet forces stumbled upon Auschwitz they were greeted by a few thousand sick and ailing prisoners, as well as hundreds of thousands of pieces of clothing, toothbrushes, glasses and seven tonnes of human hair. Army medics hurried to save the survivors, and two military field hospitals were set up; recovery, however, would not come as quick. Those who survived searched for any living relatives and a place to rebuild their lives. Displaced and alone, many refugees ended up living in temporary Displaced Persons camps before emigrating to other countries in the hope of starting a new life. However, a new life – after the things that they had witnessed and experienced – did not come easy. Even when the inmates were free from the barbed wire, from the rising smoke and the SS guards, the trauma of the death camps continued to hold them prisoner, and continued to haunt lives.

BERLIN, GERMANY, 16 APRIL - 2 MAY 1945

BERLIN

Amid the rubble of the Nazi capital, the Soviet Red Army brought Hitler's Third Reich to a violent end

Written by Michael Haskew

By the spring of 1945, World War II was in its sixth year. The once mighty war machine of the Third Reich had been brought to its knees. Assailed from both East and West, Nazi Germany was in its death throes.

Since the beginning, Allied forces had been buoyed by the cry, "On to Berlin!" Now, however, practical considerations weighed heavily on the conduct of the final weeks of the war. General Dwight D Eisenhower, supreme commander of the American and British armies advancing across the western German frontier, breached protocol and contacted Soviet Premier Josef Stalin directly, informing him that the Western Allies did not intend to fight for Berlin. For several reasons, both political and military, the battle for the Nazi capital and whatever wisps of glory might come with its capture would be left to the Soviet Red Army.

Indeed, since Hitler had launched Operation Barbarossa – the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941 – the Soviets had suffered mightily and borne the brunt of the fighting on the European continent. Millions of Soviet military and civilian lives had been lost before the Nazi juggernaut was even stemmed only 20 kilometres from the Soviet capital of Moscow, Russia. German generals peered at the gleaming onion domes of the city's buildings but could get no closer. Winter set in, and the Germans literally froze to death, while weapons and equipment failed to function in such inhospitable conditions.

The following spring, a renewed German offensive was met by a resurgent Red Army, and then the great Soviet victories at Stalingrad and Kursk occurred in 1943. Seizing the initiative, the Soviets pushed the Germans westward across thousands of kilometres, reaching Warsaw, the Polish capital, in the summer of 1944. Soviet offensives from Leningrad in the north to Odessa in the south were known as 'Stalin's ten blows'. By early 1945, East Prussia, the Baltic States, and Pomerania were in Soviet possession. The Red Army advanced from the River Vistula to the River Oder, and then to within 60 kilometres of Berlin.

Conference at the Kremlin

On 1 April, Stalin and two of his top commanders, Marshal Georgi Zhukov of the 1st Belorussian Front and Marshal Ivan Konev of the 1st Ukrainian Front, met at the Kremlin in Moscow. "Who will take Berlin?" Stalin asked. "We will!" Konev answered. Stalin proceeded to give the two commanders their orders. Zhukov was to attack Berlin from the north and east, while Konev approached from the south. The two immense Fronts would surround Berlin in a giant pincer and destroy the opposing forces in an ever-shrinking defensive perimeter.

Two weeks later, the final offensive began with the thunder of thousands of Soviet guns. Konev's advance across the River Neisse gained ground steadily, but Zhukov failed to accurately assess the strength of the main German line of resistance before Berlin at Seelöw Heights just west of the Oder, where elements of Army Group Vistula, outmanned and outgunned but full of fight and Nazi fervour, made a stand along a ridgeline. Under the command of Colonel General Gotthard Heinrici, the defenders pulled back from frontline positions just as the Soviet artillery bombardment erupted; therefore, most of the shelling failed to inflict heavy casualties. German tanks and tank-killing infantry squads saw the silhouettes of Red Army armoured vehicles and troops illuminated by their own searchlights and took a fearful toll, stalling Zhukov's advance.

After four days of fierce fighting, Zhukov broke through the Seelöw Heights defences, but the cost was high. No fewer than 30,000 Red Army soldiers were dead, along with 12,000 German troops. Stalin was enraged by the delay and ordered Konev to abandon his wider swing around Berlin and send his armoured spearheads directly towards the city. The existing rivalry between Zhukov and Konev became heated as both commanders vied for the prestige of capturing the Nazi capital.

A memorable birthday

20 April 1945, was Hitler's 56th birthday, but there was little revelry in the Führerbunker beneath the Reich Chancellery in Berlin that day. Soviet long-range artillery began shelling the capital, and the guns would not cease firing until the city had fallen. Word reached the Führer in his subterranean command centre that three defensive lines east of Berlin had been breached, including Seelöw Heights. Zhukov was advancing. Konev was in open country and moving steadily with the 4th Guards Tank Army and 3rd Guards Army leading the way. A third Red Army Front, the 2nd Belorussian under Marshal Konstantin Rokossovsky, had broken through the 3rd Panzer Army's lines. Inside Berlin, the remnants of Army and Waffen-SS units prepared makeshift defences. Old men and boys joined these soldiers for a fight to the death once the Soviets entered the city.

Territorial gains brought Berlin within range of field artillery on 22 April. A Red Army news correspondent came upon several guns preparing to unleash a storm of shells on the German capital. He later wrote, "'What are the targets?' I asked the battery commander. 'Centre of Berlin, Spree

> "As the Soviet noose tightened around Berlin, probing attacks tested the city's defences"

The rubble of the recently ended Battle of Berlin, including the shell of a bullet-riddled truck, surrounds the Brandenburg Gate

In this July 1945 photo, a heavily damaged street near the Unter den Linden in the centre of Berlin remains devastated

bridges, and the northern Stettin railway stations,' he answered. Then came the tremendous words of command: 'Open fire on the capital of Fascist Germany.' I noted the time. It was exactly 8.30am on 22 April. 96 shells fell on the centre of Berlin in the course of a few minutes."

Both Zhukov and Konev ordered a continued westward advance, and on 25 April, the leading elements of a Guards rifle regiment from the 1st Ukrainian Front made contact with troops of the US 69th Infantry Division at Torgau on the River Elbe, splitting the Third Reich in two. On the same day, the encirclement of Berlin was completed. Both the German 9th and 4th Panzer Armies were surrounded, and efforts by the 12th Army under General Walther Wenck to move to the relief of Berlin were thwarted by the westward movement of the 1st Ukrainian Front.

Defending the doomed

As the Soviet noose tightened around Berlin, probing attacks tested the city's defences. The Germans had divided three concentric rings into nine sectors. About 96.5 kilometres in circumference, the outermost ring ran across the outskirts of the capital. Flimsy at best, it consisted primarily of roadblocks, barricades of rubble and vehicles, and shallow trenches. It was compromised rapidly in numerous locations prior to the main assault on the city.

The second circle ran approximately 40 kilometres and made use of existing buildings and obstacles, including the S-Bahn, Berlin's public transportation railway system. The inner ring included the massive buildings that once housed the ministries and departments of the Nazi government. These were turned into machine-gun and anti-tank strongpoints with firing positions on each floor.

Six massive flak towers, studded with guns and virtually impervious to anything but a direct hit, were also part of the inner circle. Eight of the pie-shaped dividing sectors, labelled A through H and radiating from the centre of Berlin, crossed each of the rings to the outer perimeter. The ninth sector, named Z, was manned partially by a fanatical contingent of Hitler's personal SS guard.

The city of Berlin itself comprised 547 square kilometres, and defensive positions along the barriers of the River Spree and the Landwehr and Teltow Canals were particularly fortified. The main objective of the converging Soviet forces was the complex of government buildings known as the Citadel, north and east of the Tiergarten, a large park and residential district that was home to the Berlin Zoo.

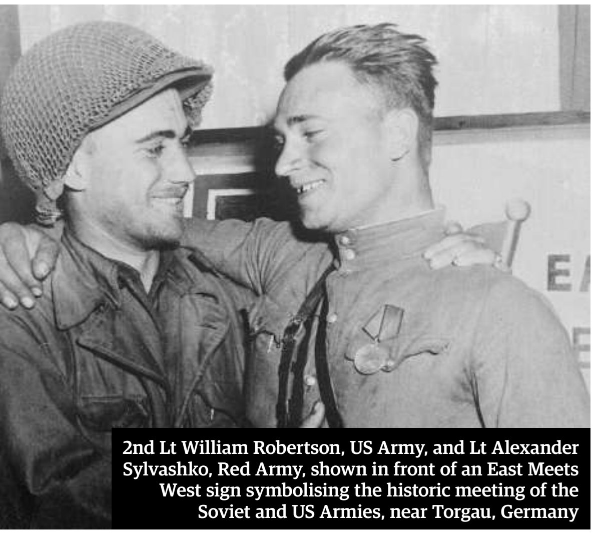
Estimates of German strength vary from roughly 100,000 to 180,000, including SS, Army, Volkssturm (People's Militia), and Hitler Youth, under the command of General Helmuth Weidling, appointed by the Führer on 23 April to lead the last-gasp defence.

On 26 April, the final chapter of the battle for Berlin began with a fury. The 8th Guards and 1st Guards Tank Armies fought their way through the second defensive circle, crossing the S-Bahn line and attacking Tempelhof Airport. To the west, elements of the 1st Belorussian Front entered Charlottenburg and drew up to the River Spree after two days of bitter combat. The Soviets advanced inexorably toward the centre of Berlin on four primary axes, along the Frankfurter Allee from the southeast, Sonnenallee from the south toward the Belle-Alliance-Platz, again from the south toward the Potsdamer Platz, and from the north toward the Reichstag, where the German Parliament had once convened and which had not been in use since a devastating fire had gutted the building in 1933.

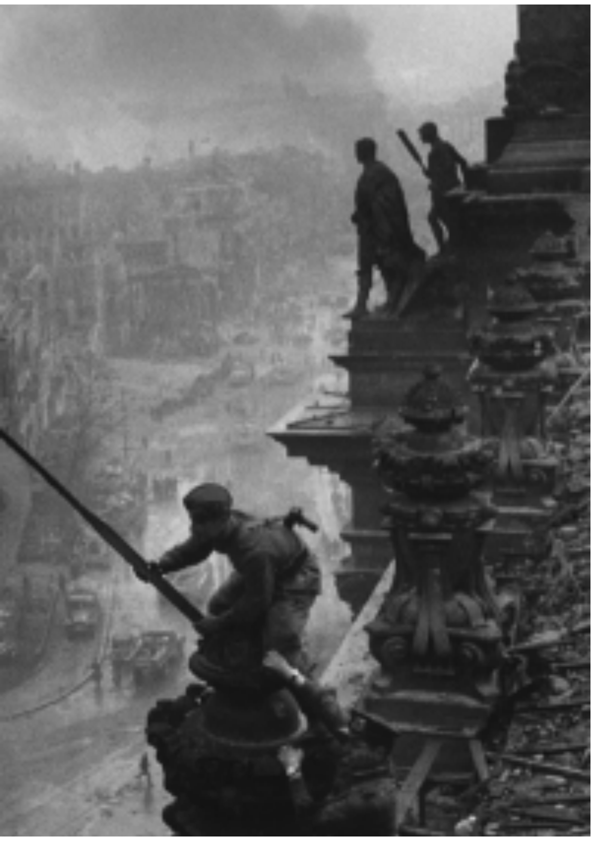
On 28 April, the Potsdamerstrasse Bridge across the Landwehr Canal was taken, and fighting spread into the Tiergarten. The next morning the 3rd Shock Army crossed the Moltke Bridge over the River Spree. The Reichstag lay to the left fronting the Konigsplatz, which was mined and heavily defended by machine-gun nests, artillery, several tanks, and a mixed bag of roughly 6,000 Germans. Attacks on the Interior Ministry building progressed sluggishly, and by dawn on 30 April, Red Army soldiers occupied Gestapo headquarters on Prinz Albrechtstrasse for a brief time before a heavy counterattack pushed them out. The Soviets did capture most of the diplomatic quarter that day.

Soldiers raise the flag of the Soviet Union above the Reichstag in a symbolic gesture of the fall of Berlin

A soldier of the Volkssturm holds a Panzerschreck anti-tank weapon on the outskirts of Berlin



2nd Lt William Robertson, US Army, and Lt Alexander Sylvashko, Red Army, shown in front of an East Meets West sign symbolising the historic meeting of the Soviet and US Armies, near Torgau, Germany



OPPOSING FORCES

SOVIET RED ARMY

MARSHAL GEORGI ZHUKOV, 1ST BELORUSSIAN FRONT

MARSHAL IVAN KONEV, 1ST UKRAINIAN FRONT

6,250 TANKS

2,700 AIRCRAFT

2.5 MILLION TROOPS

41,600 GUNS

GERMAN ARMY

GENERAL HELMUTH WEIDLING

COLONEL GENERAL GOTTHARD HEINRICI

10,400 TANKS

3,300 AIRCRAFT

1 MILLION TROOPS

1,500 GUNS

Meanwhile, the 79th Rifle Corps began a concerted effort to take the Reichstag. Troops of the 150th Rifle Division ran a gauntlet of fire across the Konigsplatz in a frontal assault. Other divisions attacked the flanks of the large building, and three attempts were beaten back between 4.30am and 1pm. The defenders were aided by 128mm guns atop one of the reinforced concrete flak towers at the Berlin Zoo firing from over a kilometre away. Soviet tanks and self-propelled assault guns lumbered into the Konigsplatz to blast German positions. A false report that a red banner had been seen flying above the Reichstag was issued at mid-afternoon when the attackers had managed to advance only partially across the Konigsplatz. Fearing the repercussions that might ensue if the report were found to be inaccurate, Major General VM Shatilov, commanding the 150th Rifle Division, ordered a redoubling of the effort.

By 6pm, the fight for the Reichstag had raged 14 hours. Soviet soldiers renewed the attack, carrying small mortars to blast open entryways that had been covered with brick and mortar. Once inside, the Soviets clashed with Germans in hand-to-hand combat throughout the building. A small group of Red Army soldiers worked their way around the back of the Reichstag and found a stairway to the roof. Sergeants Mikhail Yegorov and Meliton Kantaria rushed forward with a red banner and found an equestrian statue at the edge of the roofline. Minutes before 11pm, they jammed the staff into a space in the statue.

Although the hammer and sickle flag of the Soviet Union flew above the Reichstag on the night of 30 April, the building was not secured until 2 May, when the last 2,500 German defenders surrendered. The famed photos and footage of the flag raising were actually taken during a reenactment of the event on 3 May.

Crumbling centre

The Germans still forlornly defending Berlin were exhausted and running low on ammunition. General Weidling informed Hitler on the morning of 30 April that in a matter of hours the Red Army would be in control of the centre of the city.

The Soviet 5th Shock, 8th Guards, and 8th Guards Tank Armies advanced down the famed Unter den Linden, approaching the Reich Chancellery and the Führerbunker. Hitler authorised General Weidling to attempt a breakout from the encirclement that had formed, and then with his longtime mistress, Eva Braun, who had become his wife only hours earlier, committed suicide in the underground labyrinth.

By this time, only about 10,000 resolute German soldiers remained in defensive positions, and Soviet troops and tanks were closing in from all sides. Soviet artillery pounded the remaining defenders, relentlessly shelling the Air Ministry building on the Wilhelmstrasse, a strong position that had been reinforced with steel, concrete, and barricades. The 3rd Shock Army advanced along the northern edge of the Tiergarten and battled a cluster of German tanks while maintaining pressure on the Reichstag and the surrounding area. In concert with the movement of the 8th Guards Army, the 3rd Shock Army cut the centre of Berlin in half.

On 1 May, General Hans Krebs, chief of the German General Staff, contacted General Vasily Chuikov, commander of the 8th Guards Army, informing the Soviet officer of Hitler's death and hoping to arrange surrender terms. The attempt failed when Chuikov insisted on unconditional surrender and Krebs responded that he did not have such authority. Meanwhile, some of the German troops began attempting to break out of embattled Berlin, particularly toward the west and a hopeful surrender to British or American forces rather than the vengeful Soviets, whose people had suffered so much at the hands of the Nazis. Only a relative few succeeded after crossing the Charlottenbrücke Bridge over the River Havel. Many were killed or captured when they abruptly encountered Soviet lines.

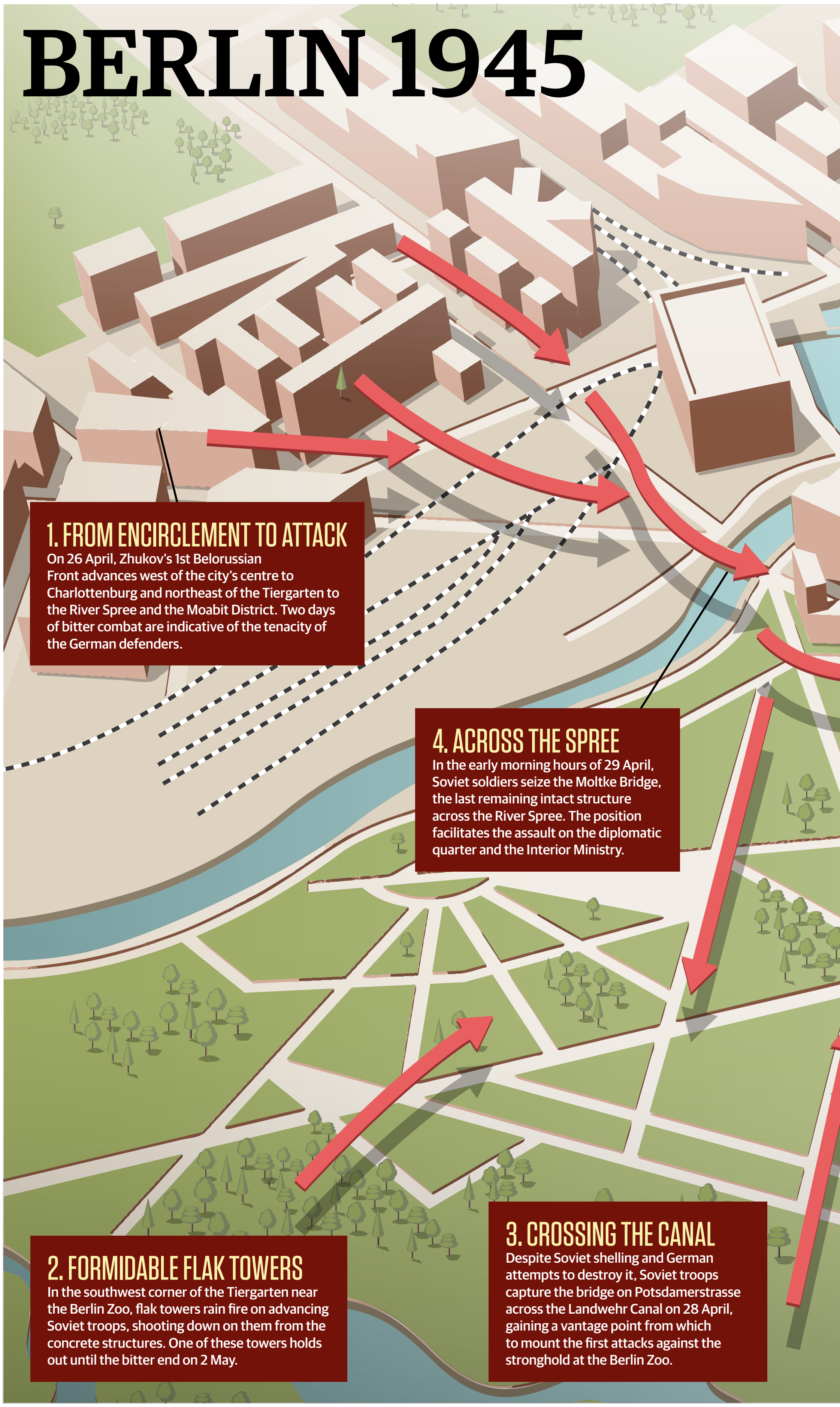
On the morning of 2 May, Red Army troops took control of the Reich Chancellery. Weidling had already sent a communiqué to General Chuikov at 1am, asking for another meeting. The German general was instructed to come to the Potsdamer Bridge at 6am. He was then taken to Chuikov's headquarters and surrendered within the hour. Weidling issued orders for all German troops to follow suit and put the directive in writing at Chuikov's request. He also made a recording of the order, and Soviet trucks blared the message through the shattered streets of the city. Some pockets of diehard SS troops resisted until they were annihilated. At the troublesome Berlin Zoo flak tower, 350 haggard German soldiers stumbled into the daylight of defeat. The Battle of Berlin was over.

Counting the cost

Casualties were staggering. During the drive from the Oder to Berlin, at least 81,000 Soviet soldiers had died and well over a quarter million were wounded. German losses are estimated at 100,000 killed, 220,000 wounded, and nearly half a million taken prisoner. At least 100,000 civilian residents of Berlin, some of whom committed suicide, had also perished.

Red Army soldiers raped and murdered countless German women. They destroyed and pillaged in retribution for the horrors previously inflicted on their Motherland by the Nazis. For some Berliners who survived the battle, the nightmare of Soviet vengeance was - perhaps - a fate worse than death.

Within a week of the fall of Berlin, World War II in Europe ended with the unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany. The Third Reich, which Hitler boasted would last 1,000 years, had ended in fiery ruin in only 12.



BERLIN 1945

1. FROM ENCIRCLEMENT TO ATTACK

On 26 April, Zhukov's 1st Belorussian Front advances west of the city's centre to Charlottenburg and northeast of the Tiergarten to the River Spree and the Moabit District. Two days of bitter combat are indicative of the tenacity of the German defenders.

2. FORMIDABLE FLAK TOWERS

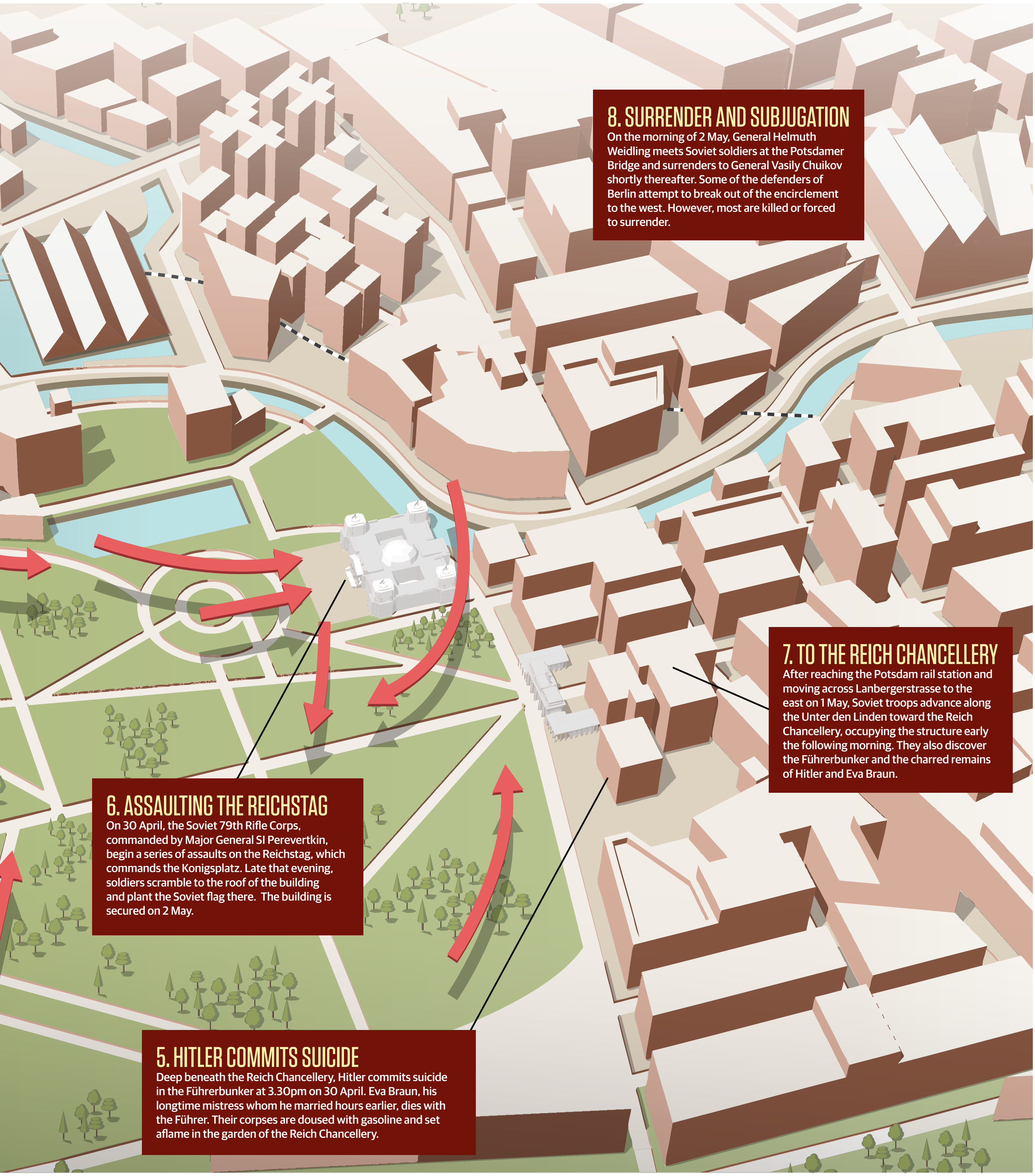
In the southwest corner of the Tiergarten near the Berlin Zoo, flak towers rain fire on advancing Soviet troops, shooting down on them from the concrete structures. One of these towers holds out until the bitter end on 2 May.

3. CROSSING THE CANAL

Despite Soviet shelling and German attempts to destroy it, Soviet troops capture the bridge on Potsdamerstrasse across the Landwehr Canal on 28 April, gaining a vantage point from which to mount the first attacks against the stronghold at the Berlin Zoo.

4. ACROSS THE SPREE

In the early morning hours of 29 April, Soviet soldiers seize the Moltke Bridge, the last remaining intact structure across the River Spree. The position facilitates the assault on the diplomatic quarter and the Interior Ministry.



8. SURRENDER AND SUBJUGATION

On the morning of 2 May, General Helmuth Weidling meets Soviet soldiers at the Potsdamer Bridge and surrenders to General Vasily Chuikov shortly thereafter. Some of the defenders of Berlin attempt to break out of the encirclement to the west. However, most are killed or forced to surrender.

7. TO THE REICH CHANCELLERY

After reaching the Potsdam rail station and moving across Lanbergerstrasse to the east on 1 May, Soviet troops advance along the Unter den Linden toward the Reich Chancellery, occupying the structure early the following morning. They also discover the Führerbunker and the charred remains of Hitler and Eva Braun.

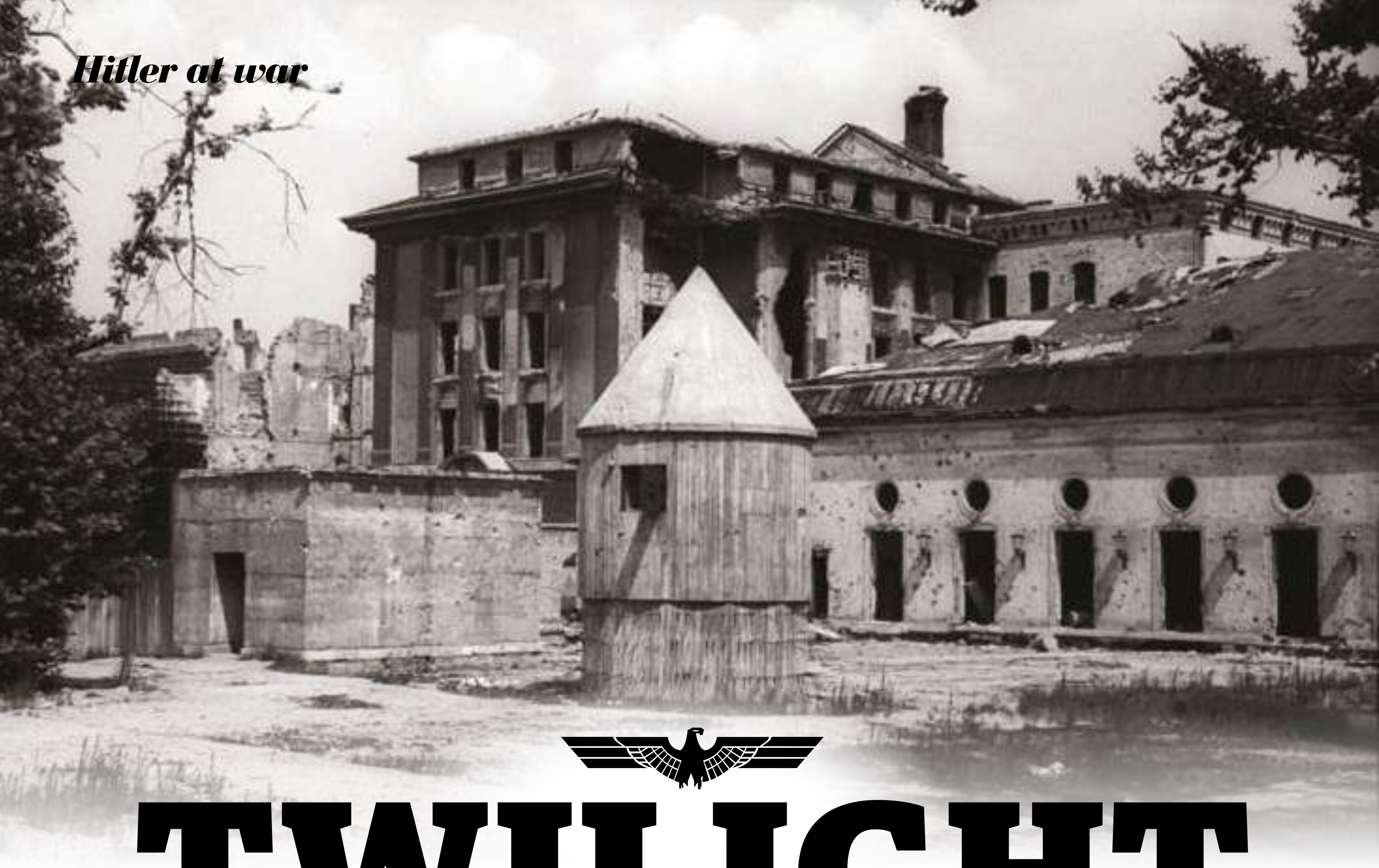
6. ASSAULTING THE REICHSTAG

On 30 April, the Soviet 79th Rifle Corps, commanded by Major General SI Perevertkin, begin a series of assaults on the Reichstag, which commands the Konigsplatz. Late that evening, soldiers scramble to the roof of the building and plant the Soviet flag there. The building is secured on 2 May.

5. HITLER COMMITS SUICIDE

Deep beneath the Reich Chancellery, Hitler commits suicide in the Führerbunker at 3.30pm on 30 April. Eva Braun, his longtime mistress whom he married hours earlier, dies with the Führer. Their corpses are doused with gasoline and set aflame in the garden of the Reich Chancellery.

© Ed Crooks



TWILIGHT IN THE FÜHRERBUNKER

Deep in the Führerbunker, Adolf Hitler perished along with his dream of Nazi world domination amid the rubble and destruction of Berlin

Written by Michael Haskew

His hands trembled. He slumped noticeably and shuffled as he walked. His eyes were often glassy. Adolf Hitler was a broken man.

A chemical cocktail of Benzedrine and eye drops laced with cocaine kept him functioning during the day. Barbiturates were needed for fitful sleep. He suffered from severe stomach pain and probably the onset of Parkinson's Disease. The once vibrant Führer of Nazi Germany hovered in the gloaming of emotional hysteria, blind rage and catatonic dejection.

In the spring of 1945, Hitler's physical and mental states were a microcosm of the destruction that surrounded him in the dying Nazi capital of Berlin. His once powerful war machine and totalitarian regime were being crushed under the weight of Allied military might. The Americans and British were closing in from the West. Worse still, his mortal enemy, the Soviet Union, had unleashed the Red Army, filled with hate and retribution for all things German, against his crumbling defences. For nearly two years, the inexorable Soviet tide had pushed German forces steadily westward more than 1,600 kilometres. Now, the enemy had reached Berlin's doorstep intent on crashing through and conquering the black heart of the Third Reich.

As early as January 1945, under the rain of heavy Allied bombing, Hitler and his entourage had retreated underground to the relative safety of the Führerbunker, 15 metres beneath the garden of the Reich Chancellery amid a cluster of administrative buildings near Berlin's Konigsplatz that was known as the Citadel. With him, either in the bunker or nearby, as the Soviets encircled the city and converged from several directions were Dr Ludwig Stumpfegger, one-time physician to Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler and now in Hitler's service, Hitler's personal secretary Martin Bormann, Günther Schwägermann, adjutant to Minister of Propaganda Doctor Josef Goebbels, Undersecretary of State for the Ministry of Propaganda Werner Naumann, Hitler's adjutant Otto Günsche, his valet Heinz Linge, chauffeur Erich Kempka, secretary Traudl Junge, and several others.

In early April, Eva Braun, Hitler's mistress for more than a decade, travelled north from Munich, determined to be with him to the bitter end. She was not summoned to join the Führer. In fact, Hitler attempted to persuade her to leave Berlin. She would have none of it and descended into the dank, shadowy existence.

Underground fortress

The Führerbunker was a masterpiece of German practicality and engineering. Although not luxurious by any means, it was functional. Construction was completed in two phases, the first in 1936, and the second in 1944. The upper level, called the Vorbunker, was topped by a concrete reinforced roof four metres thick. Four of the Vorbunker's 12 chambers were completed as kitchen space, and at the end of a long central hallway a spiral staircase led down to the lower level, where another 18 small rooms were built. Hitler and Eva Braun occupied six of these to the left off the main corridor, while close members of the Führer's staff used others. Additional rooms housed communications equipment and

Hitler and Hermann Göring visit defenders of Berlin as the Red Army approaches in early April 1945

The Goebbels family posed for this photo in happier times before its fateful descent into the Führerbunker machinery for the ventilation system, its shrill, monotonous whine pervading the entire structure.

The long passage on the lower level also served as a 5.5-square-metre conference room, where a large map covered a heavy wooden table and Hitler held daily briefings on the deteriorating military situation. Near the entrance to the Führerbunker, a battalion of 700 soldiers of the SS Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler, the Führer's personal bodyguard, were quartered. They worked as guards, couriers, telephone operators, clerks, and servants inside the Führerbunker.

On 22 April, Doctor Goebbels, his wife Magda, an ardent Nazi, and their six children, five girls and a boy ranging in age from four to 12, came to the bunker. Goebbels took a room on the lower level, while Magda and the children moved into four rooms in the Vorbunker. The children would never see daylight again. A few days later, Magda wrote to Luftwaffe Lieutenant Harald Quandt, her son from an earlier marriage, who had been taken prisoner in North Africa.

"My beloved son!" she scrawled. "By now we have been in the Führerbunker for six days already - daddy, your six little siblings and I, for the sake of giving our National Socialistic lives the only possible honourable end... You shall know that I stayed here against daddy's will, and that even last Sunday the Führer wanted to help me to get out. You know your mother - we have the same blood, for me there was no wavering. Our glorious idea is ruined and with it everything beautiful and marvellous that I have known in my life. The world that comes after the Führer and National Socialism is no longer worth living in and therefore I took the children with me, for they are too good for the life that would follow, and a merciful God will understand me when I will give them the salvation..."

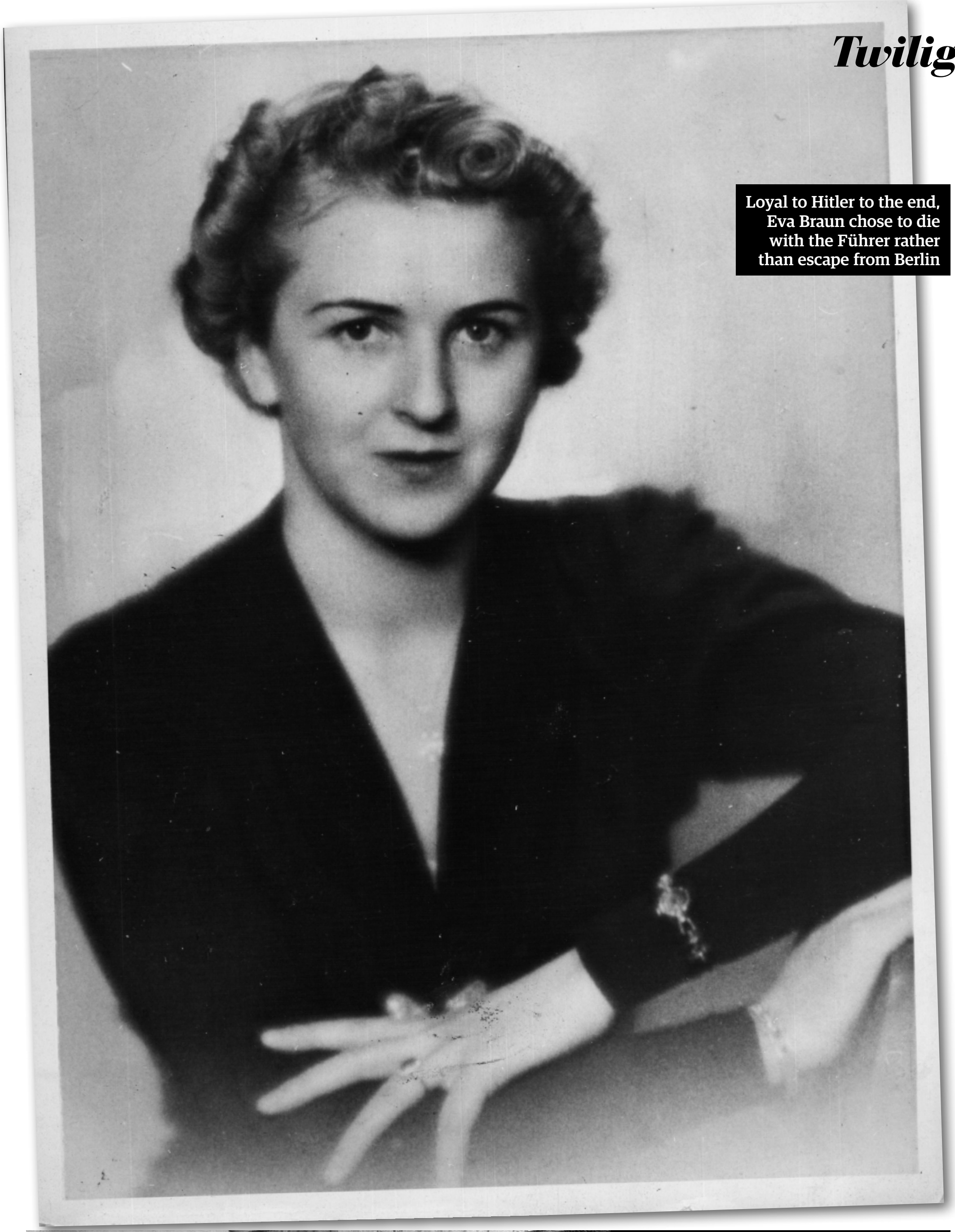
Reversals of fortune

Meanwhile, from early April the news from the frontlines had been continually disheartening. The only glimmer of hope had faded quickly. On the morning of 13 April, Goebbels informed Hitler that US President Franklin D Roosevelt was dead. Surely, the propaganda minister urged, this was a sign of divine providence. The end of the month would herald a turnaround in German fortunes on the battlefield, and Berlin would be saved. But it was not to be. Goebbels confessed, "Perhaps fate has again been cruel and made fools of us."

On 16 April, two Red Army Fronts, more than 2.5 million soldiers, initiated the final offensive to capture Berlin. Four days later, Soviet artillery began to pound the city. Hitler observed his sombre 56th birthday by leaving the safety of the bunker long enough to present Iron Crosses to several boys of the Hitler Youth who had displayed courage while fighting the Soviets. Hitler patted the cheeks of the young Nazis and told them in a voice barely above a whisper that they were good and brave boys. The Führer cut the figure of a doomed man, a wool greatcoat draped over his stooped shoulders

Hitler's personal Secretary Martin Bormann was believed to have escaped from Berlin, but his remains were later identified

An American soldier surveys the Führerbunker following Hitler's suicide and Germany's surrender



Loyal to Hitler to the end, Eva Braun chose to die with the Führer rather than escape from Berlin

as he attempted to control his palsy before the newsreel camera that recorded the event.

During his daily military conferences, Hitler often became delusional, issuing orders for high-ranking officers who were dead or missing to move armies that no longer existed to the relief of Berlin. During a conference on 22 April, the Führer exploded in a tirade. As he slowly absorbed the fact that his orders for a counterattack against the Soviets were impossible to execute, blaming the catastrophic defeat of Germany on his traitorous and weak-willed generals and the lack of National Socialist fervour among the German people, a people who deserved their fate.

The following day, Minister of Armaments Albert Speer visited the bunker and spoke with the Führer. There had been talk of an escape from Berlin, flying to Obersalzberg and possibly even carrying on the fight. However, Hitler discounted this option and seemed resigned to his own doom. He had already given permission for those who wished to leave the bunker and attempt to escape embattled Berlin to do so.

"That day he said nothing more of an imminent turning point or that there was still hope," Speer later wrote. "Rather apathetically, wearily and if it were already a matter of course, he began speaking of his death… 'I shall not fight personally. There is always the danger that I would only be wounded and fall into the hands of the Russians alive. I don't want my enemies to disgrace my body either. I've given orders that I be cremated. Fraülein Braun wants to depart this life with me… Believe me, Speer, it is easy for me to end my life. A brief moment, and I'm freed of everything, liberated from this painful existence.' I felt as if I had been talking to a man already departed. The atmosphere grew increasingly uncanny; the tragedy was nearing its end."

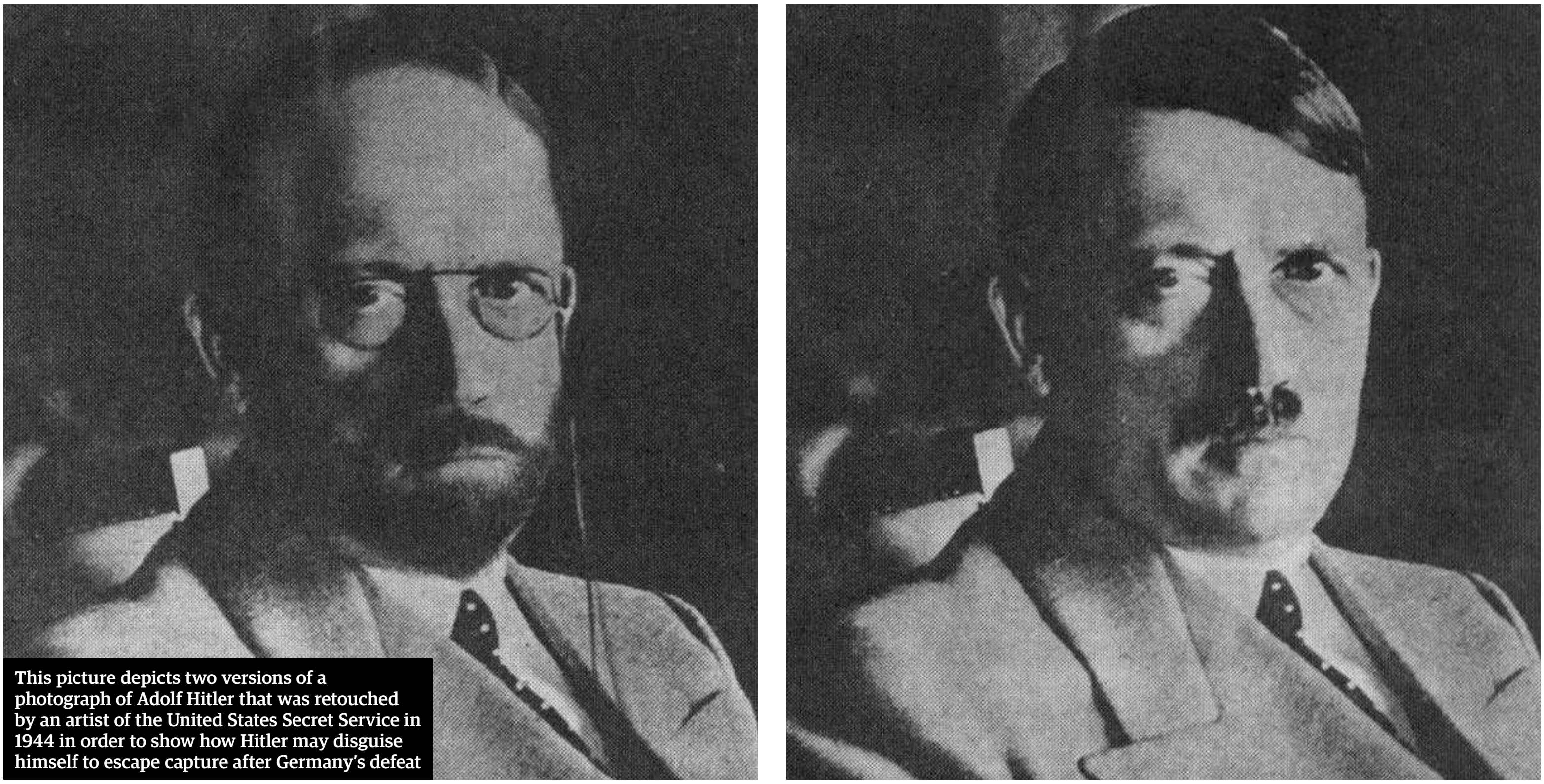
Hitler, pictured with Eva Braun and their dogs, ordered a cyanide capsule tested on his Alsatian, Blondi, as others were distributed to members of his inner circle

No honour among thieves

On the afternoon of Speer's visit, Bormann stalked into Hitler's presence with a message from Luftwaffe chief Reichsmarshal Hermann Göring, temporarily safe at Berchtesgaden in the Bavarian Alps. In 1941, Hitler had issued an order authorising Göring to take control of the German government in the event that the Führer was unable to exercise supreme authority. At this dire hour, Göring launched a bid for power saying, "My Führer… If no reply is received by 10 o'clock tonight, I shall take it for granted that you have lost your freedom of action and shall consider the conditions of your decree fulfilled…"

Hitler was apoplectic. He screamed for Göring's arrest, stripped him of his titles and rank, and dictated a response that his former deputy had committed high treason. Even his oldest and closest associates were falling away. Speer remembered, "An outburst of wild fury… in which feelings of bitterness, helplessness, self-pity, and despair mingled."

Insult was heaped upon injury when Himmler, frequently referred to as "faithful Heinrich",



This picture depicts two versions of a photograph of Adolf Hitler that was retouched by an artist of the United States Secret Service in 1944 in order to show how Hitler may disguise himself to escape capture after Germany's defeat

was revealed by British news reports to have been carrying on separate negotiations with the Allies through Swedish diplomatic channels. Ordering Himmler's immediate arrest, Hitler railed against the SS leader and retaliated by having SS Lieutenant General Hermann Fegelein, Himmler's liaison in the Führerbunker and Eva Braun's brother-in-law, summarily shot.

After firing Göring, Hitler appointed General Robert Ritter von Greim as commander of the Luftwaffe and asked the officer to come to Berlin to receive a promotion to field marshal. Famed Nazi test pilot Hanna Reitsch and Greim were lovers, and the pair boarded a small plane on the night of 26 April in response to the order. Flying so low that Soviet ground fire actually wounded Greim in the foot, Reitsch landed the aircraft in a Berlin street near the Unter den Linden a short distance from the Reich Chancellery.

As Greim met with the Führer, Reitsch begged to fly Hitler to safety. He refused. She also approached Magda Goebbels, offering to take the children out of the city. "My God! Frau Goebbels, the children cannot stay here!" she pleaded to no avail. Tempelhof Airport, south of the Citadel, fell to the Soviets that day. There would be no further opportunity for any larger aircraft to mount rescue efforts. At first professing their own desire to remain in the Führerbunker until the end, Reitsch and Greim spent three days there until Greim had recovered sufficiently to travel.

Götterdämmerung

By 28 April, the Red Army was only a mile from the Reich Chancellery. Soviet soldiers were methodically destroying the desperate defenders of Berlin, many of them old men of the Volkssturm and boys of the Hitler Youth who died side-by-side with the beleaguered veterans of General Helmuth Weidling's LVI Panzer Corps. Unit cohesion was rapidly eroding.

In the damp confines of the Führerbunker, as bits of concrete and dust fell from the ceiling with every shuddering impact of a Soviet shell, the atmosphere took on an air of impending doom, the climax of a Wagnerian opera. The Nazi Götterdämmerung, the Twilight of the Gods, was nearly at hand. Word was received that Benito Mussolini, former fascist dictator of Italy, and his mistress Claretta Petacci, had been shot by partisans and their bodies strung up by the heels in front of a garage in the city of Milan.

Hitler realised that time was short and handed cyanide capsules to those who remained in the Führerbunker. Some questioned whether the poison was potent enough to do the job. Hitler called for his dog, Blondi, an Alsatian given to him as a puppy in 1941. A capsule was crushed between Blondi's teeth, and the dog died instantly.

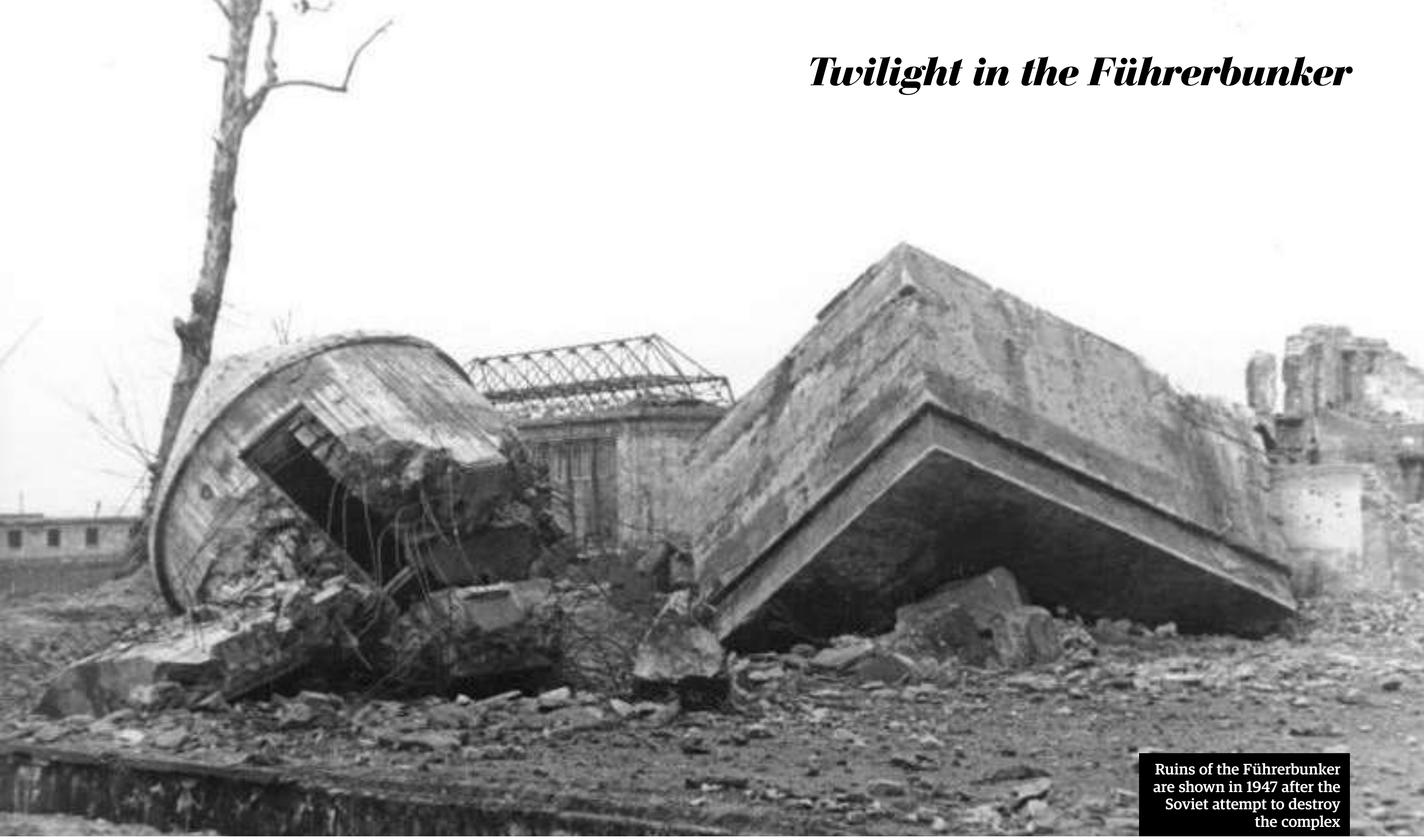
Late that night, Hitler began to dictate his last will and two-part testament to Junge. Among other things, he appointed Admiral Karl Dönitz to lead what was left of the Third Reich after his own death. He blamed the war on international Jewry. "It is untrue," he said, "that I or anyone else in Germany wanted the war in 1939. It was desired and instigated exclusively by those... statesmen who were either of Jewish descent or worked for Jewish interests."

While Hitler ranted much of the same anti-Semitic drivel he had first published in his book Mein Kampf in the 1920s, others in the Führerbunker began to discuss openly the most efficient form of suicide, poison or pistol shot. They began to smoke, something that Hitler had previously forbidden in his presence. Available alcohol flowed more freely, and for some drunkenness fostered false bravado. Others laughed, sobbed, and slept.

A few minutes after midnight on 29 April, an event took place that few individuals close to Hitler or Eva Braun believed would ever happen. A low-level Nazi Party official was pulled from the nearby front line and hustled to the Führerbunker to officiate in a hasty, macabre ceremony. Hitler and Braun attested to their Aryan lineage, Goebbels and Bormann served as witnesses, and the couple were joined in marriage. A reception followed, and the attendees drank champagne and talked of better days.

Around 2.30am, on 30 April, Hitler said final farewells to some members of his staff. At noon, his final military briefing brought nothing new – only confirmation of the inevitable. Two hours later, he ate his final meal, a vegetarian lunch. Hitler and Eva then spent a few moments with Goebbels, Bormann, and others of their inner circle. They retired to their private quarters shortly after 3pm.

Within minutes, a single shot rang out. Junge was playing with the Goebbels children at the time, and one of them shouted, "That was a direct hit!" After waiting a few minutes, Rochus Misch, a member of Hitler's SS bodyguard, entered the room. He recalled, "Heinz Linge took me to one side, and we went in. I saw Hitler slumped by the table. I didn't see any blood on his head. I saw Eva with her knees drawn up lying next to him on the



Ruins of the Führerbunker are shown in 1947 after the Soviet attempt to destroy the complex

sofa…" Hitler lay dead from a self-inflicted bullet wound to his right temple. Eva had taken cyanide and died swiftly.

Kempka had returned only moments before from a foray into the open to gather 170 litres of petrol to douse the bodies and set them alight as instructed. As Stumpfegger and Linge carried Hitler's lifeless body up the stairs and into the garden, Bormann followed with Eva's corpse over his shoulder. While Soviet artillery shells fell nearby, the cremation detail worked as rapidly as possible. Kempka, Linge, and Günsche emptied numerous cans of fuel on the bodies. Linge lit a rag found lying nearby, and in a flash the bodies of the former Führer of Germany and his wife were blazing.

With Hitler dead, the situation unravelled in the Führerbunker. Some of his cohorts scrambled away, hoping to escape the clutches of the Soviets, who would discover the charred remains of the Führer and Eva Braun buried in a shellhole within a few hours.

With the assistance of a doctor, Magda Goebbels sedated and then poisoned her children on the night of 1 May. When the children were dead, Josef and Magda reportedly took cyanide, their deaths assured by pistol shots to the head from a trusted aide. Josef had joked that he would walk up to the garden before killing himself so that others would not have to carry his body up the stairs.

After the melodrama of death and destruction played out in the Führerbunker, the Third Reich lingered a few more days. World War II in Europe ended with the surrender of Germany on 7 May 1945, but the horrific legacy of Hitler and the Nazis will remain a stain on human history forever.

FATE OF THE FÜHRERBUNKER

During a four-year campaign from 1945 to 1949 to eradicate all public evidence of the Nazi era, the Soviet government destroyed many prominent buildings of the period, including the heavily damaged Reich Chancellery. However, the Soviet attempt to blow up the Führerbunker in December 1947 was only partially successful as outer walls were demolished but little else sustained damage. In 1959, the East German government also conducted operations to destroy the underground structure.

Then, the existence of the Führerbunker, located near the infamous Berlin Wall, was obscured by the shadow of the Cold War barrier. After the fall of the Communist Bloc, a renewal of development and construction projects was undertaken in Berlin. During excavations for a residential housing complex in 1988, workers uncovered some portions of the old Führerbunker complex.

Much of the remaining structure was then completely destroyed. However, the memory of the Führerbunker and the Nazi era never completely faded. Prior to hosting the FIFA World Cup football tournament in 2006, the German government erected an informational display board that included a diagram of the Führerbunker and the story of its historical context.

89-year-old Rochus Misch, a surviving member of Hitler's SS bodyguard, attended the dedication ceremony on 8 June 2006.

The location of the Führerbunker, where Hitler met death in 1945, is commemorated with an information board erected in 2006

VISION & LEGACY

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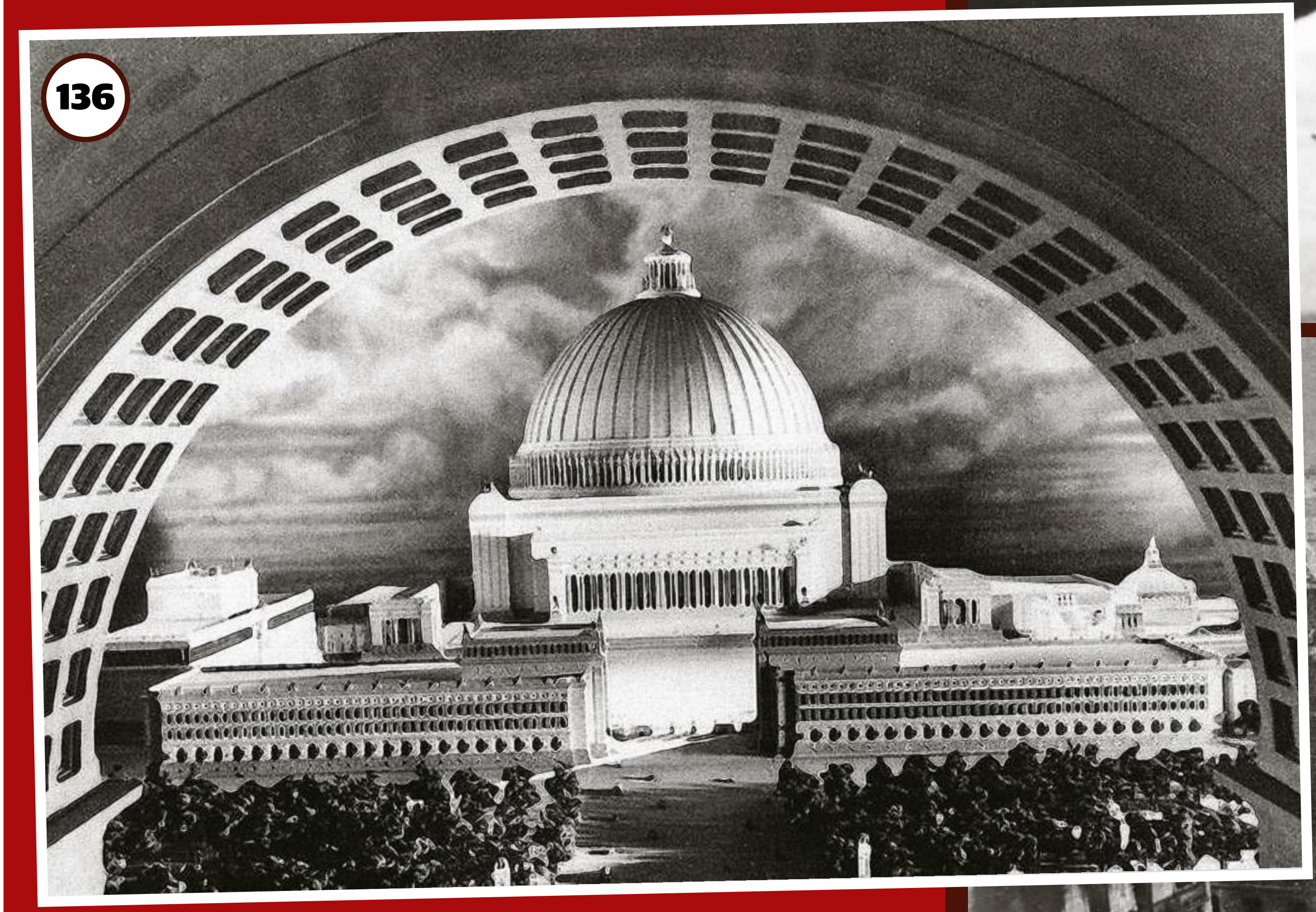
In his quest to dominate Europe, Hitler dreamed of building a global monument to Nazism

140 **LEGACY OF A MADMAN**
The aftershocks of Hitler's brief reign over Germany are still being felt around the globe



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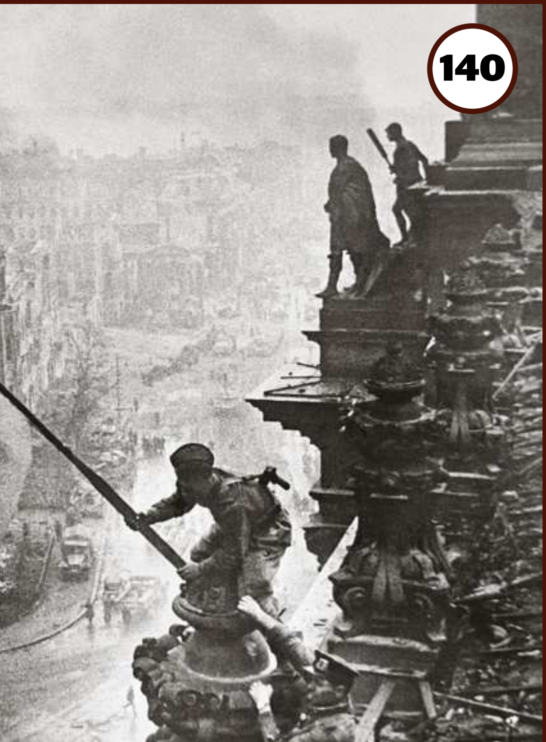

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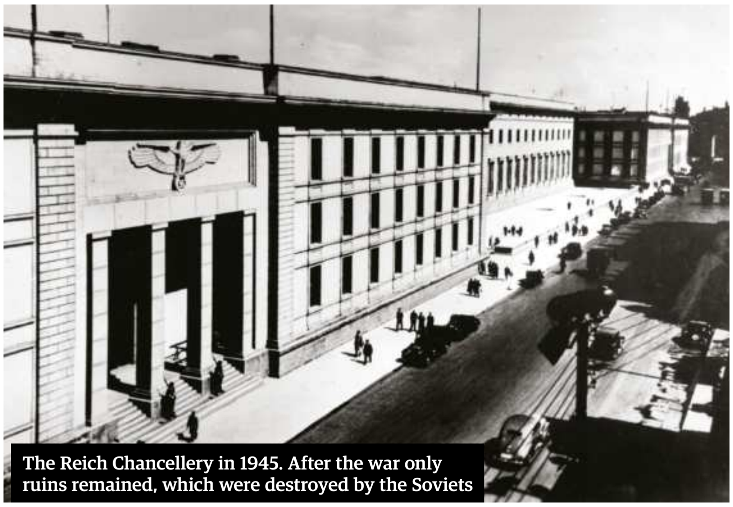
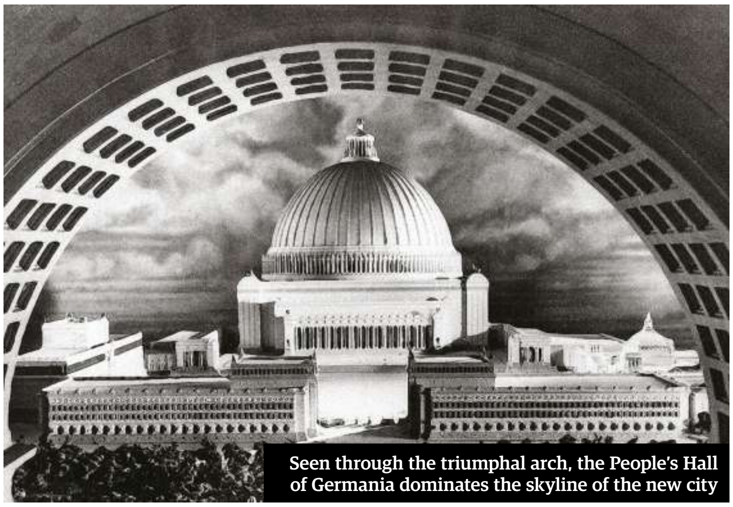
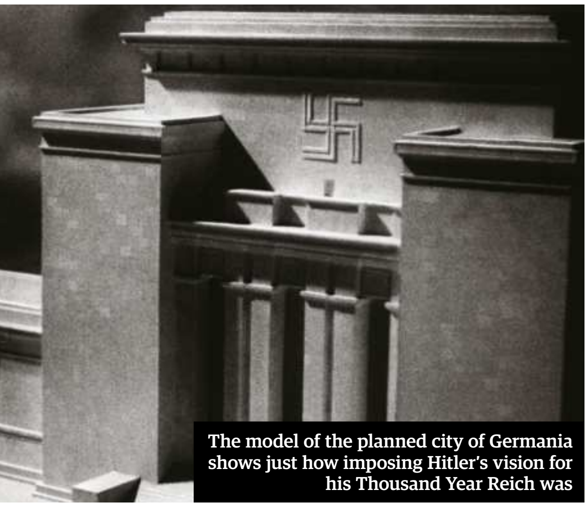
Hitler and Speer go through the itinerary for the 1935 Nuremberg Rally



The Reich Chancellery in 1945. After the war only ruins remained, which were destroyed by the Soviets



Seen through the triumphal arch, the People's Hall of Germania dominates the skyline of the new city



The model of the planned city of Germania shows just how imposing Hitler's vision for his Thousand Year Reich was

GERMANIA
A VISION OF EVIL

In his quest to dominate Europe, Hitler dreamed of building a global monument to Nazism

Written by Philippa Grafton

Sentenced at the Nuremberg Trials to 20 years in prison for his involvement in the Nazi Party's heinous crimes, Albert Speer found himself with plenty of time to reflect - and to write. Over the course of his sentence, the most celebrated architect of the Third Reich contemplated his crimes, his complicity - but above all, his close companionship with Adolf Hitler himself. "I have often asked myself," he penned in his memoir, *Inside the Third Reich*, "whether he was projecting upon me his unfulfilled youthful dream of becoming a great architect." After all, Hitler had never aspired to politics; he believed a career as an artist beckoned.

Hitler's educational record had been poor. What he lacked in an appetite for learning, however, he made up for in aspiration. Having found a talent for art, Hitler convinced himself he would one day become a great artist. Twice Hitler applied to the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna; twice he was rejected. "I was burning with impatience, but also with confident self-assurance, for the result of my entrance examination. I was so convinced I would be successful that when I received my rejection, it struck me as a bolt from the blue," he later wrote. Stunned by the rejection, Hitler sought an explanation, only for the professor to encourage another of Hitler's passions: architecture. "For me," Hitler later claimed, the art professor stated that "the Academy's school of painting was out of the question; the place for me was the school of architecture."

Initially having shown promise in his more methodical drawings, Hitler had only seen architecture as a companion to his art, but as his ability grew, so too did his passion. Yet he lacked the qualifications and experience to pursue the professor's advice. "One could not attend the Academy's architectural school without having attended the building school at the Technic, and the latter required a high-school degree," Hitler lamented. "I had none of this. The fulfilment of my artistic dream seemed physically impossible." Nevertheless, Hitler was doggedly determined to bring his dream to life. "I was firmly convinced that I should some day make a name for myself as an architect." This dream was never to be realised, but Hitler later found his expression through the young and charismatic Albert Speer.

Having built his name in the political field rather than within creative circles, Hitler's meteoric rise to power gave the fledgling dictator unrivalled influence. With his authority, Hitler finally saw a means to make his deepest architectural desires a reality. As Speer later reminisced, Hitler believed that "all that remained to remind men of the great epochs of history was their monumental architecture" - and what better way to consolidate his own Third Reich than by following in the footsteps of the Romans and Greeks before him?

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In his first years of power, Hitler had relied on Paul Ludwig Troost to channel his vision, but it was Speer who proved to truly understand - and bring to life - Hitler's dream. Having joined the National Socialists in January 1931, Speer was a relative newcomer among Hitler's closest allies. Within his first two years as a party member, Speer earned himself small commission after small commission. Not until 1933 did he win favour with Joseph Goebbels and, soon after, Hitler himself. That year he was hired to work alongside Troost on the Chancellery, where his talent captured the attention of Hitler, who befriended the young man.

By 1934, however, two deaths occurred, paving the way for both Speer and Hitler. On 21 January, Troost died. By August of the same year, so too had President von Hindenburg. Despite the blow of the former's death, the latter's demise left Hitler elated, and with total power. Just a month after Hindenburg's death, the annual Nuremberg Rally took place. It was a testament to both men's meteoric rise. More than 700,000 Nazi Party supporters attended, while Speer's imposing grandstand at the Zeppelin Field hinted at what was to come in Germany's architectural evolution.

"I struggled over those first sketches," wrote Speer, "until in an inspired moment, the idea came to me: a mighty flight of stairs topped and enclosed by a long colonnade, flanked on both ends by stone abutments." This epiphany cemented Speer's high standing in Hitler's estimations, but Speer had taken a dangerous gamble. "I had a drawing prepared," he admitted. "It showed what the stand on the Zeppelin Field would look like after generations of neglect, overgrown with ivy, its columns fallen, the walls crumbling here and there… in Hitler's entourage this drawing was regarded as blasphemous. That I could even conceive of a period of decline for the newly founded Reich destined to last a thousand years seemed outrageous. But he himself accepted my ideas as logical and illuminating. He ordered that in the future the important buildings of his Reich were to be erected in keeping with the principles of this 'law of ruins'." This 'law of ruins' became integral to the Nazis' prized architectural style; every design from that point onwards had to take into consideration how the building would look after the Third Reich had crumbled.

As the years passed, Speer's projects grew more and more ambitious, and in Hitler's eyes the architect could do no wrong. When, upon inspecting the building site of the 1936 Olympic Games based on plans drawn up by Werner March, Hitler flew into a rage and refused to attend because "he would never set foot inside a modern glass box". Speer's overnight sketch appeased the Führer, and the Games went ahead as planned.

The following year, Speer designed the towering German Pavilion for the International Exposition of Paris. It was a remarkable feat that soared above the Paris skyline and rivalled its Soviet neighbour - not least because Speer had caught a secret glimpse of the USSR's plans for its pavilion. With these designs in mind, Speer directly challenged his communist competitor. Both Speer and his Soviet counterpart, Boris Iofan, won gold medals for their designs.

It was in June 1936, however, when Hitler confided in Speer his most ardent dream for Germany. Utterly convinced that his Reich would stretch the globe, Hitler envisioned a city on an epic scale located where Berlin stood. This new 'world capital' - later named Germania - would be the beating heart of this new Germanic empire. Hitler dreamed of a large boulevard, 130 feet in width, running the length of the city. He dreamed of monumental buildings looming large over

Hitler and Speer inspect a model built to demonstrate a stadium planned for Nuremberg

Hitler explains to Speer and other high-ranking Nazis his plans for a new administrative building in Weimar

A SPOTLIGHT ON SPEER

A visionary of Nazi symbolism, Albert Speer represented a life that Hitler once hoped for himself

Born in 1905 to a family of architects, it was inevitable that the young Albert Speer would follow in his father's footsteps. A skilled draughtsman, Speer studied architecture at several of Germany's most prodigious architectural schools and, remarkably, was hired as an assistant professor at the tender age of 23. After hearing a speech by Hitler in the early 1930s, Speer was so enamoured that he joined the party in January 1931.

In 1942, Speer was promoted to the position of Reich Minister of Armaments and War Production, which meant he was in charge of the factories producing tanks, weapons and artillery, as well as supplying them to troops on the front line. Despite the ailing state of Germany at the time, Speer's efficiency and organisational skills saw production increase over the following years – incredibly by moving the factories underground to avoid Allied bombing campaigns.

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However, as WWII drew to its close, Speer was arrested and tried at the Nuremberg Trials. He was the only man on trial to take responsibility for his role in the Third Reich. As such, he escaped the death penalty, instead serving 20 years in Spandau Prison. Decades later, in a televised interview called *The Interrogation of Albert Speer*, he once again repented: "I was thinking as a specialist and not thinking as a human being and I was so specialised in my job as an architect that I forgot that humanity is the most important part of life." He died in 1981 having cultivated his own legend of 'the Nazi who said sorry'.

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> “Hitler envisioned a city on an epic scale. This new world capital – Germania – would be the beating heart of the new Germanic empire”

© Getty

the cityscape. He dreamed of an architectural triumph that put his enemies in their places. Speer was the man to whom he turned to bring his dream to life.

Germania would have been Speer’s greatest triumph as an architect. He quickly set to work, building a model approximately 100 feet in length and intricately detailed. This model was housed in its own room in the Chancellery, where Hitler was free to come and inspect it at will. It was a remarkable – and terrifying – prospect. Hitler and Speer had taken inspiration from some of Europe’s greatest creations and exaggerated them to monumental proportions. The grand boulevard called the East-West Axis was designed to be three miles long and nearly 400 feet wide – almost double the width of the Champs-Élysées. The Victory Arch, which would stand at one end of the vast road and was to be carved with the names of the 1.8 million German soldiers killed in WWI, would dwarf Napoleon’s Arc de Triomphe. Meanwhile, at the other end loomed the gargantuan People’s Hall, its dome designed to be over 16 times larger than the dome of St Peter’s Basilica in Vatican City. From his cell in Spandau Prison, Speer later wrote that Hitler “wanted the biggest of everything to glorify his works and magnify his pride. These monuments were an assertion of his claim to world domination long before he dared to voice any such intention even to his closest associates.”

Hitler’s vision for the world capital was to create a terrifying spectre of a city; Germania was to be the empire’s nerve centre, a hub of administrative buildings designed to intimidate. At the far end, standing under the shadow of the domineering People’s Hall, Speer planned a parade ground, as well as the Führer’s Palace. Here, a new Chancellery was to be built with a 500-metre-long gallery to walk through to reach the head of state’s offices, a vast, overwhelming space designed to cow even the hardiest of politicians.

In 1938, work began to make Germania a reality, starting with creating the East-West Axis, as well as clearing space for the People’s Hall. Near to the site of the planned Victory Arch, a dense concrete cylinder was built to test the strength of the ground in 1941 – Berlin had famously been built on soft marshland, and in reality the dream of Germania far exceeded what the land it was destined to be built on could withstand. Between the start of construction and the end of World War II, work stopped and started on Germania, influenced by Germany’s successes in war. After the Nazis successfully invaded Paris in 1940, work recommenced on Germania in earnest, Hitler and Speer’s passions reignited by the fallen city’s charm.

As Germany’s victories turned to defeat, however, the realisation of Germania became increasingly unlikely. Having suffered devastating losses to the Soviets on the Eastern Front, the project was abandoned once and for all in 1943. Speer, once Hitler’s go-to architect, found himself firmly embedded in the Nazi war machine, promoted to Minister of Armaments and War Production – but the Thousand Year Reich of which they dreamed was crumbling before their very eyes.

In his memoirs, Speer recounted Hitler revealing, years after their initial meeting, that he had been “looking for an architect to whom I could entrust my building plans. I wanted someone young; for as you know these plans extend far into the future, I need someone who will be able to continue after my death with the authority I have conferred on him. I saw you as that man.” This great Germanic empire in which Hitler so strongly believed never came to be. His world capital of Germania now exists merely as a footnote in the history of Nazism, its sheer scale and ambition almost overshadowed by the monstrous evil of Hitler’s regime.

The Soviet flag is raised over a devastated Berlin in May 1945, a symbol of Hitler's ultimate failure

LEGACY OF A MADMAN

The aftershocks of Hitler's brief reign over Germany are still being felt around the globe

Written by David Foley

The world is still dealing with the consequences of Hitler's actions. The extent of those consequences is, however, a matter of debate, hinging on the question of how important Hitler was to the events that overtook the world in the middle of the 20th Century.

A few historians have raised the notion that Hitler was not the mastermind of the Nazi Party, but was instead simply carried along by events and then betrayed by underlings. In this scenario, the Nazis would have risen to power even without Hitler, and the world would inevitably have been plunged into a war to stop them. Most, though, find such a reading of history to be unacceptable, and believe that he was the prime driving force in a small party. Without his personal leadership, the Nazis would probably have remained a footnote to German history.

It is a difficult argument to engage in, because elevating Hitler's importance inevitably gives his memory a power that it would lack if he was written off as a mere passenger on the Nazi machine. In 1996, the British historian Alan Bullock (who wrote an early biography of Hitler) delivered a lecture at the London School of Economics, in which he raised the question of whether the roles of both Hitler and Stalin had in fact been exaggerated. Would the fate of Germany have been the same if another man had been in charge of the Nazi Party? Were the two tyrants actually in part dragged along by the momentum of circumstances?

Bullock eventually came down on the other side of the argument, insisting that both Hitler and Stalin had been crucial in the paths taken by their countries. It is the view held by most historians and it leads to some uncomfortable conclusions when attempting to assess the scope of Hitler's legacy. If he was indeed the driving force behind the Nazis, then his impact on the world was nothing short of catastrophic.

Architect of disaster

Without Hitler, there would have been no World War II. There were problems to be faced in Germany after World War I, as there were in other nations, but it was Hitler's driving ambition that

© Photo by TASS via Getty Images

pushed his country into war with its neighbours. The immediate effects were all too obvious. The death toll was staggering. In Germany alone an estimated eight million people were dead. Six million Jews had been murdered by the Nazi regime. In Russia, the death toll may have been as high as 27 million, while in China it was 20 million. The total number of dead is estimated at between 70 and 85 million.

Despite the scarcely fathomable levels of destruction unleashed by his ambitions, Hitler failed in his primary aim. Far from expanding into the East and defeating the communists, Germany saw its borders shrink, while communism ended the war greatly strengthened. Eurasia and Eastern Europe fell under the red cloak, while China, North Korea and Vietnam followed one by one.

New world order

The empires of Britain and France were broken by the war, and the Americans and Soviets became the dominant powers in the post-war world, drawing new battle lines for a Cold War that would last for more than 40 years. The scale of the Soviet threat is best demonstrated by the fact that old enemies were quickly welcomed back into the fold (Italy was a founder member of NATO and West Germany joined in 1955) in order to stand against them.

The war also forced America to tap into its huge potential. It may have been dragged kicking and screaming onto the global stage, but it has stayed there ever since. Part of that tapped potential was an immense capacity for war-making. Military technology advanced at a tremendous rate during the war, culminating in the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

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A white supremacist rally in the US state of Georgia, 2018

> “When German children grew up, they wanted answers about their parents’ role in the war – the answers were often deeply disturbing”

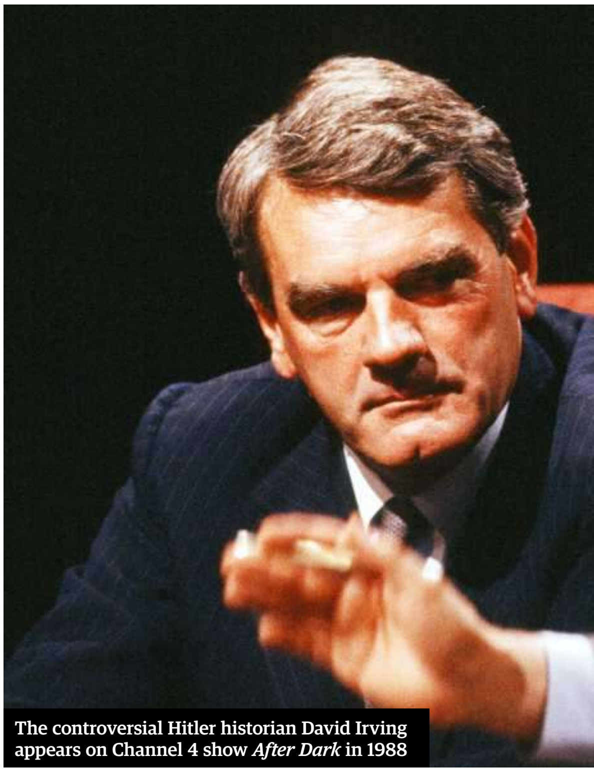
For Germany itself, the impact of the war was stark. Apart from the destruction unleashed upon its cities, the nation was eventually split in two and millions of its citizens were displaced during the carving up of territories that followed.

At the Potsdam Conference (held between 17 July and 2 August 1945) the ‘five Ds’ were the underlying force behind negotiations between the victorious powers: demilitarisation, denazification, democratisation, decentralisation and deindustrialisation. Four ‘occupation zones’ were set up in Germany, to be administered by the British, French, Americans and Russians. Also divided were Austria and the cities of Vienna and Berlin.

The partition of Germany would become symbolised by the Berlin Wall, which sprang up to divide East and West Berlin in 1961. The city, and the nation, would remain divided until the wall fell in 1989, with the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) and the German Democratic Republic (East Germany), reunifying the following year.

In Germany, the reaction to the trauma of World War II played out over three main phases. The initial response, perhaps understandably, was one of blankness. The philosopher and political theorist Hannah Arendt wrote of this after travelling through Germany after the war, describing a country that stubbornly refused to face what had happened.

What had happened, of course, was so awful that a certain amount of numbness was inevitable. Arendt conceded that the years leading up to the war, and the war itself, had exhausted the German people. Living in a constant state of emergency, which the Nazis had consciously employed as



The controversial Hitler historian David Irving appears on Channel 4 show *After Dark* in 1988

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THE HITLER DIARIES

Hunger for anything Hitler related led to one of the great forgery stories in modern times

Konrad Kujau had already enjoyed a fairly lucrative career as a forger of Hitler paintings when he hit upon the idea of also faking the Führer's diaries in 1978. The con seemed to be a surefire winner, but while the people who bought paintings by Hitler might have been reticent about drawing attention to themselves, diaries were always going to attract serious scrutiny.

Somehow, Kujau pulled off the brazen hoax for years, despite even emblazoning his fake diaries with the initials 'FH' instead of 'AH'.

The desire to know more about the workings of Hitler's mind led to intense interest in the diaries, and in the 1980s, German magazine *Stern* paid more than £2 million for the 62 volumes Kujau had painstakingly created, drawing on historical documents and his own imagination.

When the diaries were uncovered as fakes, it suddenly seemed obvious. Apart from using tea to stain the pages to make them appear older than they were, Kujau's work was hardly convincing, but this was an era before widespread 'fake news'. The con unravelled when *The Sunday Times*, which had paid *Stern* for UK serialisation rights, involved an expert, Professor Hugh Trevor-Roper, to authenticate the diaries. After initially seeming enthusiastic, he soon voiced strong doubts.

The truth then swiftly emerged when tests proved the ink, paper and binding used in the diaries dated from after the war. Kujau was convicted of fraud and given a four-and-a-half year prison sentence.

a means to attain and then keep power, had robbed the population of the gift of empathy.

The past was not completely swept under the carpet – some 89,000 people were investigated for their role in the Nazi regime, and there were 6,500 convictions. Nevertheless, many Nazis were integrated back into society, which helped ease the transition to peacetime but resulted in an often toxic environment of mistrust.

Yudit Yago-Jung wrote of her experiences as a child born in Germany in 1946. Her parents (her father was Jewish) were reluctant to talk about the war and mixed with a limited circle of friends. When they spoke of the war, one or more of the group would usually end up in tears and her father's hands would shake whenever talk turned to Hitler or the Gestapo. Yago-Jung saw a similar approach in the parents of her friends, although often for different reasons. “By hushing things up,” she wrote, “the parents of my German friends tried to conceal their own cooperation or, at best, their passive tolerance of horrors in the Third Reich.”

Student demonstrations became normal in Germany in the 1960s

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This wall of silence inevitably led to the second phase of the German response to the legacy of Hitler. When these young children grew up, they were no longer willing to be satisfied with trite statements along the lines of “Hitler was the devil”. They wanted answers about their parents' role in the war, and the answers were often deeply disturbing. This led, in the 1960s, to a general air of rebellion against all authority figures: parents, teachers and politicians.

A third wave of reaction began in the 1980s, when a still younger generation began to feel distance from the war. With blameless parents, and with the usual perception of distance between themselves and their grandparents, this generation did not feel guilt and was not afraid to broach the subject of the war, but they became increasingly tired of having to do so. The situation of West Germany at the time, occupied by hundreds of thousands of foreign troops and a base for thousands of nuclear warheads over which it had no control, was also increasingly objectionable to a generation that felt no responsibility for the war. The perception grew that it was time to put the past behind them, leading to the breaking down of the Berlin Wall and German reunification.

A morbid fascination

Despite this urge to move on, there was also a lingering fascination with Hitler himself. How had a seemingly inconsequential man, with few if any ambitions, risen to take control of a modern, enlightened country and drive it to such utter destruction? Attempts to understand Hitler had started before the war, and they only intensified afterwards. There have been attempts in Germany to disown him, viewing him as a foreigner whose crimes therefore do not reflect directly on the German people. This sleight of hand, however, cannot diminish the enormity of his actions.

The first scholarly biographies of Hitler began to arrive in the 1950s. Alan Bullock's *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny* was the first, and others have followed in a never-ending torrent. Joachim Fest's 1973 work – *Hitler: A Career* (which was the basis for a documentary film four years later) – and Brigitte Hamann's 1996 consideration of Hitler's period in Vienna have stood out in a crowded field. There are names and fortunes to be made through writing about Hitler, with any new angle or nugget of documentary material likely to be gobbled up by the insatiable appetite to know more about the man, an appetite that led directly to the fiasco surrounding forged diaries in the 1980s.

It can be a dangerous field in which to venture. No historian can appear in any way sympathetic

"AUX ARMES
ETC..."

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Comparing a politician (in this case Emmanuel Macron) to Hitler remains a damaging slur

The Berlin Wall stood until 1989

© GERARD MALIE/AFP/Getty Images

to any of Hitler's decisions without risking vitriolic criticism. The toxicity of the entire Nazi credo means that no historian or politician can claim validity in any element of it and still be taken seriously, and a comparison to Hitler is still a popular slur. Revisionist histories have, of course, appeared, notably those from the Holocaust-denier David Irving (as depicted as recently as 2016 in the film *Denial*) – his attempts to depict Hitler as a rational, highly intelligent man who was let down by those working beneath him, was largely derided.

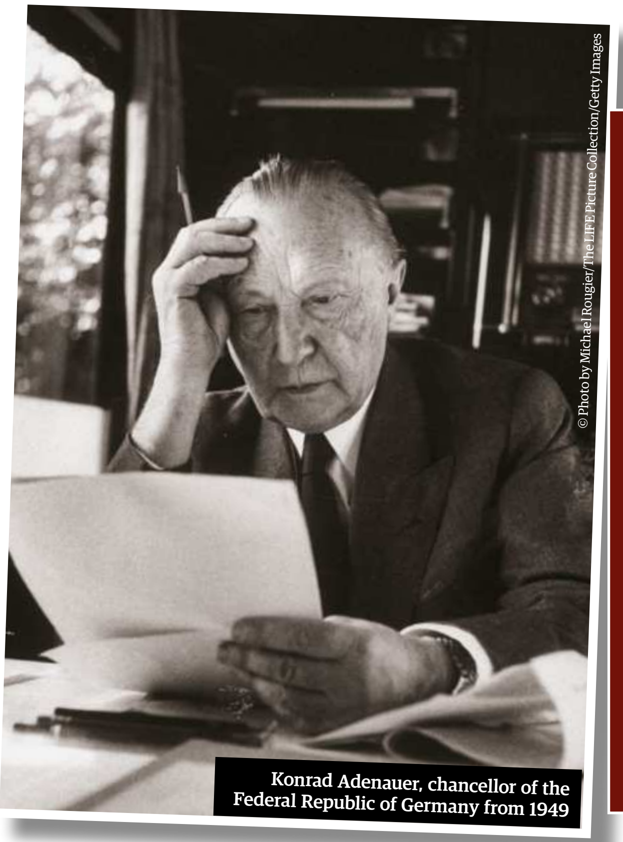
Such interpretations of history are lapped up by the neo-Nazi movement, a form of right-wing extremism that embraces some of the central tenets of the Nazis, including their racism and ultranationalism. A political movement based on hatred, the neo-Nazis are linked with Holocaust-denial and admiration for Hitler. A thriving market for Nazi memorabilia confirms that this remains an attractive, or at least fascinating ideology for some, although neo-Nazism is very much a fringe element of the far right. No mainstream political party could survive the promotion or even tolerance of any Nazi principles.

Despite this, neo-Nazi elements exist in many European nations. Combat 18, formed in the UK in 1992, was one of the most notorious, with activity in many nations during its brief history (the '18' of the organisation's name was supposedly a reference to Hitler's initials, being the first and eighth letters of the alphabet). The organisation is now extinct, though the name is still used by a small number of people. Other groups have also sprung up, including many that are proscribed by the authorities for supporting terrorist activities. The threat of violence from neo-Nazi groups remains very real, as demonstrated when an anti-fascist demonstrator was run over and killed by a white supremacist in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017.

Hitler in the arts

Hitler himself has attained a cult-like status for some, and the fascination with his character is demonstrated by the continuing strong sales of his book, *Mein Kampf*. The idea that some parts of his character (such as his charisma and ability to galvanise public opinion) can be viewed as desirable traits in a business leader is no longer taboo in some parts of the world, notably in modern India.

There have been several waves of popularity for books, films and documentaries about Hitler, with no easily discernible cause for any of them. In the 1960s, 1970s and again in the 1990s (with films such as *Schindler's List*), there have been repeated periods of interest in the world of the Nazis, and Hitler in particular. This in some ways peaked with the 2004 release of *Downfall*. Based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Konrad Adenauer, chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany from 1949

A FIGURE OF FUN

Satirists have sought to attack Hitler in a variety of ways over the years

Propaganda posters during the war often played up the brutality of the German regime, but some also mocked Hitler for his appearance. Satire is a tried and trusted method of undermining a despot, and Hitler found himself a target from the early days. Since 1940, when Charlie Chaplin lampooned the Führer in his film *The Great Dictator*, artists have attempted to burst Hitler's bubble.

Comic depictions of the man have appeared on television and in the cinema ever since, with notable examples including *Monty Python's Flying Circus* (in which John Cleese played 'Mr. Hilter' who was living in a flat in Somerset) and Mel Brooks' *History of the World: Part I* (which included a mock trailer for a planned sequel entitled 'Hitler on Ice').

© Photo by Hulton Archive/Getty Images

Charlie Chaplin as 'Adenoid Hynkel' in 1940's *The Great Dictator*

The trend continues to the modern day, as demonstrated by the 2015 German production *Look Who's Back*, in which Hitler mysteriously appears in modern-day Berlin but can't get anyone to accept that he is the genuine article. Filmed with actual members of the public, director David Wnendt remarked that out of 300 hours of footage, only two negative reactions to 'Hitler' were encountered. "If you put him on a T-shirt, I think people would buy it," Wnendt commented.

Critical reaction to such works is generally mixed, with some claiming that no humour can be found in the life of such a monster, while others insist that undermining the mystique that still surrounds the man is a valuable endeavour.

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Bruno Ganz stars as Hitler in the 2004 film *Downfall*

on the book of the same name by Joachim Fest, *Downfall* depicted a Hitler who was searching for a form of nobility in defeat, a defeat so total that it would attain mythic proportions. Fest's depiction is backed up by Hitler's infamous 'Nero order' (Nerobefehl) of 19 March 1945, which insisted on the continuation of a scorched-earth policy long after defeat had become inevitable.

The Reich minister of propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, saw the awful potential of the order as soon as it was issued. "Should we fall," he commented, "then the whole of Germany will fall with us, and that will happen in such a glorious way that the heroic downfall of the Germans will rank first in world history." Aspiring to be the greatest losers of all time is a curious ambition for a nation's leaders, but Fest insisted that this was in fact the case, that Hitler could not stomach mere defeat and craved total annihilation.

Downfall reignited the debate over whether it is acceptable to portray Hitler as a human being, especially a human being with some traits that could be considered positive. Controversy also swirled over the implication that it was a small ruling clique that drove Germany to destruction. In *Downfall*, the German people are just more victims of Hitler and the Nazis.

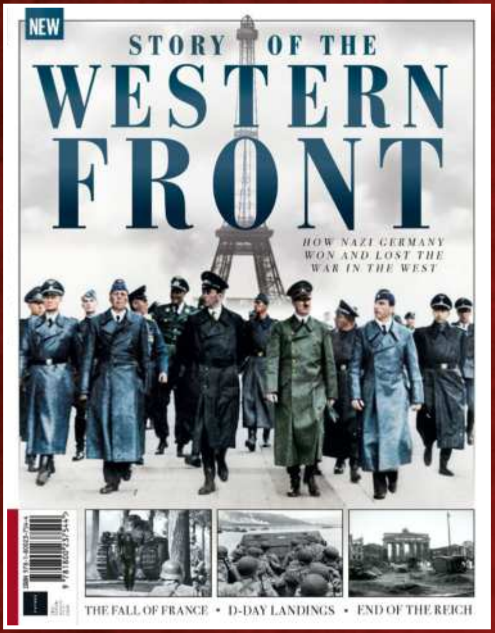
The unspeakable events of World War II are still a burden for Germany, even as the country has rebuilt and re-established itself as a leader in Western Europe. At the turn of the millennium, there was still a tendency in the German media to search for Nazi connections in its politicians, and any such stigmatising remains poisonous. It remains difficult to write anything about the Nazi state without condemning it out of hand – anything that hints at understanding of any element of the regime is potentially disastrous to a career. The controversial German historian Ernst Nolte expressed concern over this, speaking of an atmosphere in Germany that is hostile to "intellectual freedom", but the battlefield is considered far too hazardous to step onto for most.

Moving forwards

The decision to destroy Hitler's remains, in order to prevent his grave from becoming a shrine for neo-Nazis, appears to have been a sensible one. The body of Mussolini attracts visitors every day, while the graves of Hitler's parents are regularly decorated with fresh flowers. The idea of a focal point for the ideas that Hitler brought into the world is a truly disturbing one.

And yet, even though he has unequivocally vanished from the face of the earth, Hitler's name remains potent and his legacy continues. More than 70 years after his death, he remains the bogeyman of Western civilisation. More reviled than any of the mass murderers who went before him or came after, he stands alone on top of the totem pole of the world's most evil leaders. Uncomfortable as it may be, Hitler still has the power to fascinate, appal and even terrify to this day.

HISTORY OF THE OLYMPIC GAMES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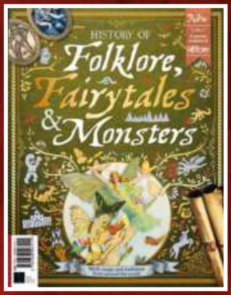
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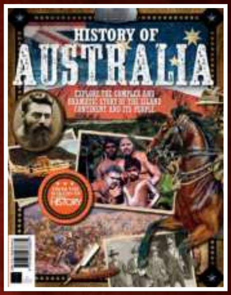
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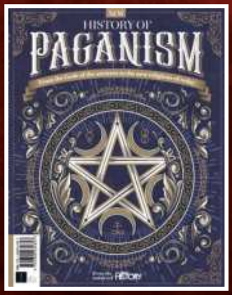
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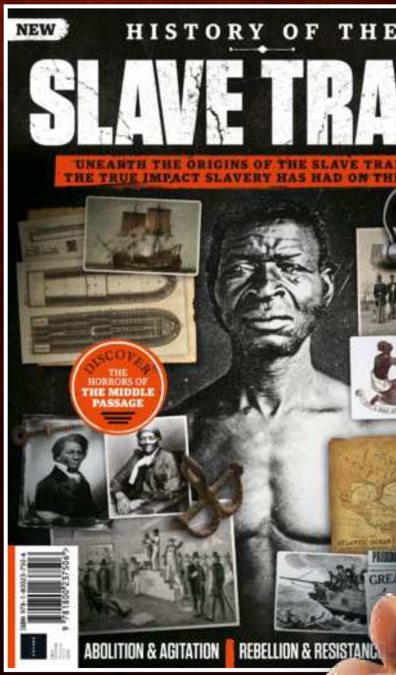
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